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LOBENGULA

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Drawn by the Author from a sketch made by M. Lionel Décle in 1892.

LOBENGULA

LOBENGULA

by

HUGH MARSHALL HOLE
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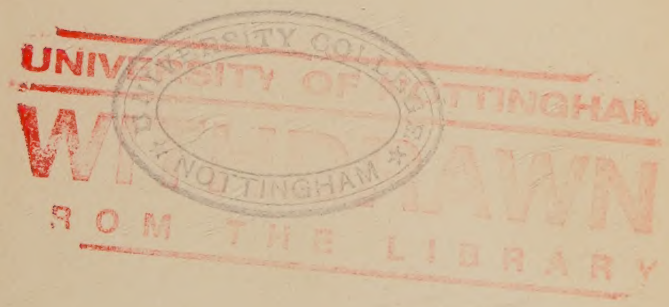

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To

MY WIFE

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INTRODUCTION

THOUGH Africa herself remains immutable from age to age the ebb and flow of her humanity have never ceased, and there is no reason to suppose ever will. What assurance have we, after all, that the map-changes brought about in the last hundred years are more than fleeting ; that the patches and streaks of civilisation in the South and on the coastal fringe—a matter of two million white folk in a black population sixty times their number—will be permanent and gradually overspread the whole Continent ? The dark shadow has not vanished. It has only become chequered a little, here and there.

It is no new thing—this colonisation by the higher races. The Phœnicians tried it, centuries ago ; the ancient builders of the stone forts and cities in Rhodesia had their day and vanished ; the Arabs trailed their vicious influence across the land and were absorbed ; the Portuguese, with nobler aims and better opportunities, have wasted four hundred years and have little to show, and now the English and the Dutch, the French and the Belgians pride themselves that they are fixed for ever. God grant that it may not be an illusion, but the dark shadow is there.

It is in South Africa that the civilising influence has had the freest scope, and there, if we may judge by the towns built and the industries established, the reclamation would appear to be complete and final. Yet only a hundred years ago British South Africa comprised merely the Cape of Good Hope and a narrow belt of country to the north and east of it. All beyond was the happy hunting ground of savages, whose politics and struggles for supremacy were unrestrained by humane conventions; whose law was brute force, and whose occupations were rapine and the shedding of blood. What is a hundred years in the life of a continent, and who dare predict that the fostering policy that stops the black people from killing one another and enacts laws for their better hygiene and better education, will not in the end defeat its own purpose—tempt them to reassert themselves and make them powerful enough some day to oust the alien whites?

A hundred years ago the pioneer farmers at the Cape were engaged as much in defending themselves against marauding, cattle-thieving Kaffirs as in tending their crops and herds. No notion of elevating the natives occurred to them. The black man was either a slave or an enemy. A few enterprising Englishmen tried about that time to start a trading settlement in what is now Natal. They found the country ravaged and almost depopulated by a warlike tribe which had only recently come to the fore—the Zulus, who owed their military ascendancy

entirely to their King, Tshaka. This man, from the position of a petty chief, had become the despotic sovereign of all the neighbouring peoples. His word was law, and death was the portion of all who disobeyed him. His *impis*, armed with short stabbing spears, had established a régime of terror over a wide region. Every season he sent out his raiders into new districts to reduce some weaker tribe. Their methods never varied. The cattle, the young women and the boys were brought back as captives, the rest butchered, and Tshaka and his Zulus waxed fat and prosperous.

But ' they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.' About the time that the Englishmen first set foot in his country rivals were springing up and turning to their own profit the lessons that Tshaka had instilled into them. Treachery was encircling him, and the first blow came from one in whom he had placed implicit confidence. This was Mziligazi, the chief of the clan called Matabele (' the people of the long shields '), whose skill in warfare and ferocious daring had raised him in early manhood to the position of Commander-in-Chief of Tshaka's army. From his youth he had been familiar with killing ; his father Matshobane had been assassinated and he himself had been apprenticed in the school of murderers whom Tshaka employed as his sanguinary tools. His very name spoke his profession, for Mziligazi means ' the pathway of blood.'

PART I

The Dark Shadow

Chapter I

THE BIRTH OF A TRIBE

At the close of an afternoon in October, 1822, Mziligazi stood beneath the shade of a spreading *umkuna* tree, looking across a wide, grassy plain, with his face to the setting sun. Grouped round him were about a dozen Matabele soldiers, some leaning on their long ox-hide shields, while others, squatting on the ground, were wiping blood and filth from the broad blades of their stabbing *assegais* with tufts of grass.

In the distance, on the western side, dense columns of grey smoke ascended from several burning villages and blurred the rugged outlines of the Drakensburg mountains. Nearer at hand, on the right, a chain of pools marked the winding course of the Pongola river—now almost dry after six rainless months—and along its southern bank marched the slowly advancing crescent of the army, half-hidden in clouds of dust. The feet of the soldiers stamped in rhythm to the monotonous chant of a war-song broken by shrill whistlings and brutish howls, while every now and then individual figures rushed out in front of the moving ranks, poising their spears and stabbing the ground in

front of them—one stab for each life taken in the fight.

"*Jiya! Jiya!*" they screamed as they pierced the imaginary victims.

Arrived within fifty yards of their commander the advancing host came to a halt. There was a moment's hush. Then at one end of the long crescent a few men uttered a call which seemed to stir some extraordinary emotion among the whole mass, drunk as they were with blood and victory. The call was taken up and swelled at last into a deafening roar from five thousand throats: "*Bayete!*"

Mziligazi started, and glanced furtively at those standing near him, but they too caught the enthusiasm. From grim soldiers they seemed on the instant to become servile suitors for his favour. "*Bayete!*" they shouted, and again as they caught a smile of self-satisfied approval on their leader's countenance, "*Bayete, Kumalo!*" It was the Royal Salute, now for the first time given to a Zulu other than Tshaka the King.

Mziligazi held up his *assegai* and there was a dead silence, disturbed only by the troubled lowing of a mob of scared cattle which were being driven from the rear round one flank of the army—the booty of the raid. Never had so many head rewarded Mziligazi, and as he watched them pressing forward before the yelling herds, his hard mouth relaxed in a grin; and he grunted "*How! how!*" with delight

and triumph, while the *indunas* round him redoubled their fulsome praises.

When the cattle had trooped past and the dust had cleared a little, a quivering, whimpering string of young women was pushed forward, some with infants on their backs and a few leading children by the hand—over three hundred altogether, and the oldest hardly more than a girl. Last of all in this procession of victory came a number of older women bearing calabashes of beer, baskets of grain and joints of raw beef on their heads. Occasionally one stumbled under her load but was forced to rise and stagger on by cruel blows from the *sjamboks* of the young men who drove them. Poor wretches! They knew that they were only saved as beasts of burden, and that as soon as they had served their temporary purpose they would be clubbed or stabbed to death and left in the *veld* as food for the vultures, for old women were of no use to the Zulu King—only young maidens, fit for his own harem or for distribution to his favourite *indunas*.

As the sun set the army broke into excited groups. Innumerable fires were lighted; the calabashes of beer were passed round; the air began to reek with the savour of roasting beef, and Mziligazi's fighting men settled down to a night of feasting and carousal.

The party under the *umkuna* tree was waited on by slaves, and all others kept at a respectful distance. When the leaders had appeased their hunger and thirst they drew closer to their fire, exchanged snuff

and began to converse in subdued voices. One by one they took up the talk. Mziligazi alone remained silent.

" To-day," began a morose young man with a long narrow head, who was called Kolongwane, " To-day we are the conquerors. Must we go back to be slaves ? Are these fat cattle and these comely *intombis* all to go to our master, Tshaka, who will give us perhaps for our trouble a few scraggy cows ? Yet we have done the work and risked our lives."

Another spoke. One of his eyes was missing and the scar of an old wound zigzagged across the empty socket. " As soon as we have handed over our prizes to Tshaka we shall be sent out to get more. Shall we never be allowed to rest ? Never to have wives to brew beer for us ? We are the reapers, but the harvest is another's. I am tired of seeking wealth for one who is already over-rich."

Next Skwalibani, a small sly-looking man, whose face was deeply pitted with pock-marks, chimed in : " Do lions let the hyena rob them of their kill ? Are we to sit licking our chops and watch another gorging our meat ? "

Kalipi, a lithe, alert savage, wearing an immense head-dress and cape of black ostrich feathers, took up the tale : " Before us are rich pasture lands," said he, " girls ready to be ours ; boys to train for fighting ; cattle as plentiful as ants. Let us go there, *Nkos*, and have a country of our own."

The others murmured their approval, and last

of all Umnombata, the oldest of the group, and the only one, except Mziligazi, who wore the *dhlodhlo* or head-ring—the badge of a married man—voiced aloud what was in the minds of all.

" It is you we want, son of Matshobane. Let Tshaka find others to kill for him. We here are one people. Be you our King."

At this there was a buzz of excitement. All began to talk at once, some half rising and snapping their fingers to emphasise their words. " Be you our King, son of Matshobane ! "—" You are strong and shall lead us ! "—" What can Tshaka do ? "—" Already he fears his brother, Dingaan ! "—" Yes, and he fears Mzwiti, too, the one who slew your father, Mziligazi."—" It is you we want. You shall be our King ! "

Gradually the voices died down to grunts and mutterings and the speakers resumed their squatting attitude. For a few minutes no word was spoken while the snuff-boxes were again passed round. All looked expectantly at Mziligazi, who fidgeted with his hands, scratched his stomach, picked up a twig and broke it, while keeping his eyes fixed on the ground in front of him. At last he looked up and broke silence.

" Will you follow me then ; do my bidding, and never look back ? Will you forsake your fathers and the mothers that bore you ? "

The response was immediate. Fervent cries of " *Yebo, Nkos !* "—" *Nkosi baba !* "

" Be it so then, my *indunas*. Let us seek a new country together. There must be no delay, for Tshaka will send others to stop us. To-morrow at sunrise we will march westwards and take with us the cattle and the girls, and we will get more cattle, and all shall have their wives."

Suddenly he rose and drew himself up to his full height, an imposing figure in the firelight.

" Let Tshaka do what he likes ! We Matabele have done with him. I, Mziligazi, the son of Matshobane, will be your King ! "

The others sprang again to their feet and once more shouted the Royal Salute. Those near by caught the sound and passed the news from group to group. All left their fires and their beer and rushed up to form an immense ring. Rattling their spears on their shields they broke into a wild war-dance.

But ere long Mziligazi bade them get back to their fires, for he knew they would need to husband all their strength for the long march before them.

Chapter II

THE MISSIONARY

SEVEN years passed by—years of ruthless pillage for the Matabele ; of terror and catastrophe for the unhappy tribes they encountered in their devastating progress. From Zululand, which they had left behind them, to the fertile Marico district in the western Transvaal the invaders swept down upon their victims like wolves upon a flock of sheep, robbing, enslaving, killing. Near the headwaters of the Crocodile river they built a great *kraal* which they called Mosega, and from there they carried their savage raids east, west and south, leaving ruin and desolation where before had been peace and contentment. The *induna* Umnombata became the King's chief counsellor, and the terrible Kalipi his most trusted lieutenant. All that these two had foretold had come about—girls to seize as wives, boys to capture and train as soldiers and an abundance of sleek cattle. All other living things were butchered without mercy. The Matabele revelled in arrogant prosperity and feared no one but their King, whose iron discipline was their only law.

Let us glance at him again as he was in the heyday

of his career—this despot whose name had become a by-word throughout South Africa.

Just before the rainy season of 1829 two men were seated in friendly conversation beside an old-fashioned full-tented Boer waggon which was outspanned in a clump of mimosa trees on the outskirts of Mosega. They were about the same age, but in appearance they were poles apart. One, a slightly-built white man in the early thirties, was dressed in a blue shirt, worn tunic-fashion, with a leather belt and white duck trousers. On his head was a sort of shako, like that worn by a French railway porter, of dark blue cloth with a varnished peak. In one hand he held a book, with a finger between the leaves to mark a page. His face was thoughtful and slightly ascetic, but his eyes were twinkling with life and energy. A short black beard concealed his mouth and chin, and he spoke in broken staccato sentences—obviously in a tongue with which he was not very familiar. His name was Robert Moffat and he had journeyed 250 miles by waggon from his mission station at Kuruman on purpose to visit the Matabele marauder with the fame of whose exploits the whole countryside had long been ringing. Refugees from the hunted Bechuana, Bakathla and other inoffensive tribes had fled to Kuruman and told their woes to Moffat, who at last made up his mind to trek across country and see whether he could induce the King to desist from his hateful persecutions.

With the exception of two traders who had

visited Mosega during the previous year, Moffat was the first white man that Mziligazi or any of his people had set eyes on, and he was greeted with unexpected cordiality. For two or three days he was overwhelmed with presents of beef and beer, and a constant crowd of men and women thronged his waggon to gratify their curiosity and beg or pilfer the beads and other trade-goods of which he had a small supply. But he had utterly failed to convince the King of the error of his ways, and this was his final interview preparatory to starting on his journey back to his quiet mission station. As he looked at the figure in front of him he thought of Og the King of Basan and of Sihon King of the Amorites, and wondered what the purpose of the Lord was in allowing such monsters to inhabit the earth.

Mziligazi was now in the prime of life, and physically a splendid animal. His reddish black skin and outstanding muscles gave him the appearance of a bronze statue, but his countenance was cruel and foxy, suggesting a beast of prey. He was entirely naked except for a narrow *mutja* of blue monkey skins, and a long jaunty crane's feather sticking up from his head, on which was also the *dhlodhlo*—a small black ring of gum worked into the wool. Though his expression was sensual, his small black eyes were sharp and constantly shifting.

For several hours he had been listening with curious interest to a description of the English—their customs; their hatred of bloodshed; their

system of government and their reliance on God above, and he appeared loth to part with the white man who had given him so much amusement.

" I like you," he said, " I like you, and you shall be my father and I will call you by the name of my father—Matshobane. But much of your talk is *huhana* (nonsense). Some day perhaps I shall send a few of my *indunas* to Capetown to see the white men. They shall be my eyes and will come back and tell me whether you have been lying to me. But as for your counsel about our own customs, you speak ignorantly. If I stop my soldiers from eating up the Bakathla and the other peoples in this country, where shall we get our cattle and our slaves and our women ? Where shall we get little boys to train for fighting ? "

Moffat hesitated a little and then began once more to speak of God, in whose sight the killing and enslaving of human beings were awful crimes which would bring eternal punishment on those who committed them. He was conscious of the difficulty of convincing one to whom abstract ideas of God and right and wrong were entirely novel, but the very hopelessness of his task emboldened him, and he prayed mentally for guidance. After all Mziligazi, however brutalised, was a sentient being ; a man fashioned in God's image, and somewhere in the depths of his nature there must be a spark of humanity if he could only catch it. But the King only laughed heartily.

" When a man is dead he is dead," he said ; " and how can your God hurt him then ? The ways of you white men are not ours. But I wish to be your friend. You shall stay here with me, and you shall teach us to read and write and to make waggons. I will give you three wives and plenty of cattle, and my slaves shall build you a house for yourself and others for your wives."

Disconcerted and shocked, Moffat made a last appeal. In the eyes of God it was deadly sin for a man to have more than one wife, and he held forth at some length on the wickedness of polygamy. But he might as well have addressed a brick wall, and the King was evidently getting bored with a discussion which had at first only amused him.

" Stop this foolish talk," he said with a show of irritation. " Who ever heard of a bull with only one cow, and am I, a great King, to do without my wives ? Am I not to have sons to fight and daughters to give in exchange for cattle ? Besides, the more wives a man has the less work there is for each to do. Look there ! " he added, pointing to a group of women and children seated in front of a hut a little distance away. He gave a call. Two of the women, with a little nervousness, rose and came forward, crouching and stooping as they approached and finally squatting on the ground in front of their lord and master. Both were shapely, if somewhat inclined to corpulence. Their oiled skins shone like burnished copper. Their heads were shaved, all

but a small tuft of wool on the top into which was worked an ornament of fine red beads fashioned like an inverted cup. Their necks and waists were festooned with chains of larger blue beads, and there were elaborate bead patterns of red and white sewn on the black ox-hide kilts which formed their only garments. One had with her a naked boy about eight years old, who squatted in the dust beside his mother. The other, who sat a little in the rear, was suckling an infant whom she supported on her hip.

Mziligazi pointed at the former.

" See, Matshobane, my father, that is Umoaka, my ' great wife,' the daughter of Mzwiti, to whom I paid a hundred fat cows for her ; and this is my son by her, and henceforth I will call him by the name of your own *kraal*—Nkulumana (Kuruman). I will now come to your waggon and you shall give me one of your big oxen, which I will keep for him until he is a man."

The missionary was rather taken aback at this one-sided compliment, but did not dare to refuse the demands of the King, whose irritation had now vanished and who laughed heartily at the prospect of getting an Afrikander ox for nothing.

Indeed, the idea was such a happy one that he seemed inclined to pursue it. He beckoned to the other woman.

" Bring the boy and give him to the white man," he told her.

She crawled forward and held the infant up to

Moffat, who took him awkwardly with both hands and set him on his knee.

" That is also my son," the King went on. " His name is Lobengula (' he that drives like the wind '), but if you wish it I will give him too a new name to show my friendship for you."

Moffat was now seriously alarmed. He saw with dismay what the King's protestations of friendship were leading to. There was no knowing how many royal sons might be forthcoming, and he only had sixteen oxen to haul the waggon back to Kuruman.

Gravely he regarded the helpless babe. A thought flashed through his mind. If only he could take him, while still untainted and innocent, to Kuruman ; pluck him from the hateful surroundings of the savage *kraal* ; train him as a Christian, and rescue him from the career of bloodshed which doubtless awaited him. A strange intuition came to him that this child might be destined to be an influence for good. He prayed silently to Heaven that it might be so.

But little Lobengula resented being gazed at, and set up a lusty howl. Moffat rose and handed him to his mother, who took him back to her breast and quieted him. The King also rose, for he had seen the oxen being driven up to be yoked, and his greed was aroused.

" Come, Matshobane," he said, " before you leave I want to choose the two beasts that you are going to give me as a present." He moved towards

the waggon as he spoke and Moffat hurried after him. He feared further extortion, and in his anxiety to protect his property from this grasping cattle-thief he forgot all about the child Lobengula—and his destiny.

Chapter III

THE BOER TREK

Another seven years. It was 1836—the year of the great Boer Trek. On the north bank of the Vaal river, Hendrik Potgieter, the leader of the main body, had called a halt, while detached parties were sent out to reconnoitre. The last ponderous waggon was slowly creaking up from the newly-made drift; the gaunt Afrikander oxen were straining heavily at their yokes, the leaders swerving now to the right, now to the left, to dodge the strokes of the short whips of rhinoceros hide with which the Hottentot boys lashed them. The other drivers were giving a hand to get this final load up to the outspan, where more than forty waggons were already standing, their dingy white tents spreading over several acres of ground. By each waggon was a family group getting ready for the evening meal. Men and lads were chopping down thorn-trees or making fast the oxen by *reims* to the trek-tows; women of all ages, from grandmothers to young matrons with infants at the breast, were seated on rough home-made stools, cutting up pumpkins and steaks of spring-buck for the supper stew; setting iron pots of coffee on the

wood fires, or kneading Boer meal for cookies. The younger women and girls were mostly fair with regular features of the German type, but their figures were shapeless, and such beauty as they possessed was concealed by the hideous sun-bonnets of black linen which flapped round their faces. Some of the bigger children were dragging up dead wood and stacking it by the fires, while the little ones played in the dust and got in everyone's way. At one waggon a few clustered round Mynheer van Rensburg, an aged Boer, the patriarch of the Trek, who in sonorous tones was reading slowly from an immense leather-bound Bible, following the lines with his finger as he spelt out the familiar texts.

The drivers and the *voor-loepers* had their own separate fires. They were all undersized Hottentots or ' bastards,' ranging in hue from dark brown to a sickly pallor tinged with red on their cheek-bones. There were a few women among them—noisy, frowsy and vicious looking. In the distance more Hottentots, some of them mounted, were slowly rounding up a large mob of horses, cattle and sheep.

As the sun sank towards the horizon the Predikant, Carel Cilliers, a tall Boer in knee-breeches and a long frock-coat—originally of black broad-cloth, but now green with age—climbed on the box of one of the waggons and opened a case containing a kind of harmonium, on which he began to play a few wheezy chords. Gradually in twos and threes others

gathered round, and presently all were droning out the evening hymn with which each day's journey was closed. The Hottentot servants held aloof and remained indifferent. They were not of the Lord's chosen people. And there was also another group of a dozen or more bronzed and loose-limbed men who took no part in the singing. Weary with the long trek and the labour of cutting trees, they flung themselves on the ground in a circle round one of the fires and pulled out clay pipes, while one of them went to a waggon and, after rummaging about, produced a black bottle of *schnapps* and some cracked tea-cups which were passed round. Gruffly and with frequent pauses they exchanged remarks in their guttural 'Taal.'

"We have trusted in the Lord and He has delivered us," said old Arend Swanepoel. "This is the land of Canaan. Never did I see so many buck and quagga. We shall have no lack of *veld-schoen* or *sjamboks*. There are elephants too, and *kameel* (giraffe), for I have seen their *spoor*. There is more meat here than we could kill and eat in a lifetime."

"The *veld* also is good"—Andries Botha, another veteran, was speaking—"better than any I have seen down Colony, and there's no lack of water. Here each one of us may ride off 10,000 *morgen* of grazing-land and there will still be plenty left for those who will follow us."

"Not so fast," interjected young Koos Bekker. "What is the use of pasture unless we have slaves

to herd our beasts? There are no Kaffirs here and no Totties (Hottentots)."

"How do you know?" retorted the old man. "In a country like this there must be plenty—perhaps more than we bargain for. What about this *schelm* of a Zulu—Moselekatse, or some such name—that the missionaries are always talking about? His people hunt in packs like wild dogs. Their country is ahead of us, and we must keep our eyes skinned or we shall have trouble with them."

"That is true," put in Hendrik Potgieter, the Commandant, "but this Zulu King has given his word to Mynheer Benjamin D'Urban, the new English Governor at Capetown, to keep the peace and to be a friend of the white man. The missionaries got hold of him, and he sent five of his head men to Capetown just now and a treaty was signed."

"Peace?" said another, Dirk Scheepers. "How can there be peace between tigers and buck? As for the missionaries, to hell with them, say I! It was they who persuaded the English Government to rob us of our slaves. And where is the money we were promised for them? Not one rix-dollar did I receive, and they made me give up twenty men and women at Graaf-Reinet. At least we shall be quit of the *verdomde* missionaries here!"

"*Ja, ja!*" put in Adolf Bronkhorst, a saturnine man with a bushy black beard, who had not before spoken. "We are out of the Englishman's *kraal* at last. We are our own masters and can make our

own laws, and if the Englishmen want to come here they must do as we tell them. This is *Ons Land*. No more Englishmen for me and no more of their meddlesome missionaries. Remember *Slagters nek !* "

The faces of all darkened, and one or two muttered a curse. But the conversation was flagging. Old Swanepoel had fallen asleep and was snoring, and the others were more or less drowsy.

At this moment a gun-shot broke the air. The singing by the Predikant's waggon stopped abruptly. The group by the fire sprang to their feet and gazed in the direction from which the sound came. The sun was now down, but in the failing light, on the side away from the river, they descried a solitary rider, his form silhouetted against the sky-line. His horse was dead-beat and limping. He himself was hatless, and his loose moleskin trousers were stained with mud. Stiffly he dismounted and, leading the horse up to the Predikant's waggon, flung the reins to a boy. They saw that it was Stephanus Erasmus, of Aliwal, the lion-hunter, famous as a dead shot. " Give me water," he rasped out in a hoarse voice. A jug was handed to him and he drank with great gulps. " *Allemagtig !* What's wrong, Oom Phanie ? " asked two or three, when at length he put the jug down.

" The damned Zulus ! " he answered. " They've caught old Barend Liebenburg and cut his throat. They've murdered all the men and raped and killed

their wives ; and Jan du Toit has been killed with his wife and the other children and all."

Those who heard groaned and pressed closer round him.

" *Ja !* " he repeated. " Killed him and all those with him, men, women and children ; I saw them all stark and dead. They've fired the waggons and driven off the cattle. Thousands of them—the black devils ! And soon they will be coming to do the same to you. Up, *Kerels* ! " he suddenly shouted, " make haste and inspan ! Yoke up and make a *lager*, for Moselekatse's fighting men are on the war-path, and they'll be on us before sun-up."

At once all was bustle and confusion. Shouting men and scared, anxious women ran back to their waggons and hastily collected their chattels. The tired oxen were kicked up and forced once more to their yokes. A few of the oldest Boers stayed to hear details of Erasmus's terrible story.

It was all too true. Erasmus and two of his sons had left the camp of Liebenburg the day before to go after a troop of giraffe. They had galloped down and shot two, and the father had ridden back in the evening to get boys to bring in the hides and meat. But at the stream a ghastly sight met his eyes. Where that morning had been a busy camp—the advanced guard of the trekkers—all was desolation and ruin. The smoking remains of the waggons, broken chairs, torn bedding and, worst of all, strewn over the *veld*, the speared and mutilated corpses of

thirteen white men, women and children, lying in pools of blood, were all that remained to tell the tale. Most of their Hottentot servants had met the same fate, but Erasmus found one—sorely wounded but still alive—who gave a confused account of the affair. From him he learnt that the Zulus were led by one Kalipi, that they caught the party absolutely unprepared, and before the Boers could use their firearms had murdered them all except three little children whom they had carried off—for what purpose could only be surmised.

Chapter IV

THE MATABELE ATTACK

Potgieter hastily called a council of the older men. Some were for making *lager* where they were, but Erasmus, who was quite unnerved by the horrors he had seen at Liebenburg's camp, insisted that the only safe plan was to get back over the river ; and in spite of the danger that they might be attacked while on the move this was the course adopted. Only those who have seen the process can realise what a troublesome business it is to get a string of Cape waggons turned round so as to go back over a track. A great sweep had to be executed over the rough bushy scrub before the clumsy vehicles could be manœuvred into position for re-crossing the drift, and the whole night was occupied in carrying out the movement. The confusion was terrible. The shouts and oaths of the men, the cries of the children and the incessant cracking of thirty or forty whips made a hubbub that could have been heard for miles, and had Mziligazi's *impi* been within earshot and descended upon them, Hendrik Potgieter's party would have been helpless and another massacre inevitable. But night-attacks were unusual with the Zulus, and

before dawn, by extraordinary exertions, all were across the drift. The waggons were drawn up in a square, the pole of each overlapping the one next it. Sacks of meal were piled on the rails to form an extra rampart, and the spaces between were filled with hastily-cut thorn-bushes. The horses were led in through a narrow opening, left for the purpose, and securely tethered. There was no room for the oxen and sheep. As soon as daylight came the tired Hottentots were set to cut bushes to form a rough *kraal* for the former, but their energies were almost exhausted, and although they were driven to the work with *sjamboks* it was a hopeless task. Eventually the stock were left to run loose.

All that day and most of the night incessant watch was kept, the men and women taking turns to act as sentries. Some of the Boers made short reconnaissances on horseback, but without discovering any sign of the enemy, and a few of the younger ones began to grumble, and accused Erasmus of duping them. But Potgieter bade them get on with the work of strengthening the *lager*. The old-fashioned muzzle-loaders, of which nearly every man had two, were overhauled, and the women busied themselves in filling powder-flasks and melting lead for the bullet-moulds. When night came they felt fairly secure, and after Potgieter had posted sentries the remainder sank wearily to sleep in their clothes.

. . . . . .

Just as the first streak of grey light showed on the eastern sky-line there was a shout. Young Frikky Jansen, one of the watchers, had caught sight of some object moving in the deep shadow of the bushes by the drift, and at once gave the alarm. Instantly all within the *lager* were alert. They had not long to wait. An uncanny rattling sound was the first sign, and as it grew in volume a long semi-circle of shadowy figures was seen in the dim half-light advancing at a run towards the *lager*. As they drew near they sent up a hellish scream, as a pack of wolves give tongue on first scenting their prey, and again those awaiting the onslaught heard the horrid rattle of spears on ox-hide shields.

Potgieter had warned his men to hold their fire, and not until the approaching crescent was within seventy yards did he discharge his own gun as the signal for all to follow. "*Schiet, kerels!*" ("Fire, my lads!") he shouted. From twenty or more of the long Dutch *roers* came a raking volley, and then instantly another, for by each man stood a woman with a second gun ready loaded to hand to him. For the moment the onrush was checked. The Zulus were taken by surprise, and could be espied dropping behind bushes and skulking out of sight. This was not quite what they expected, and not such good fun as springing an early morning attack on a Bechuana village. These white men could sting. But the pause was short; in less than five minutes a second attack was launched, and, regardless of the gaps in

their ranks, on they came—this time right up to the ring of waggons, which they tried to board, so as to get to close quarters with their stabbing *assegais*. Volley after volley was poured into them at close range, while the women even took part in the defence, battering the heads of the attackers with yoke-skeys and sticks. Several of them came up with kettles of boiling water—one with a pot of molten lead—which they poured on those of the savages who were holding to the sides of the waggons.

Unable to gain their object a body of the enemy swung round to attack the opposite side of the *lager*, but the light was now good, and there also they were driven back by a murderous fire. Only one of the savages succeeded in crawling between the wheels and penetrating the defence, and he had his brains beaten out by a Boer with a clubbed musket, while close up to the waggons many more were soon lying dead or writhing with wounds. Baffled on both sides the enraged Zulus began hurling their spears among the defenders and did some damage, but their leader soon put a stop to this and ordered them to desist. At his command the remains of the *impi* fell back out of range and for a brief space disappeared. This emboldened some of the Boers to saddle their horses in the hope of harassing their retreat. But they speedily became aware that a fresh move was in preparation. With wild war-whoops the natives were encircling the cattle, and though many were dropped

by bullets at long range it was not long before the whole mob of a thousand oxen were rounded up and galloping towards the drift. A few men gave chase on horseback, but saw that they were hopelessly outnumbered, and that without the protection of their waggons it would be courting death to put themselves within reach of the cruel *assegais*. They realised that the natives were trying to lure them out into the open, and reluctantly gave up the pursuit. They saved a few wounded cattle, and sheep with broken legs, but the rest were gone beyond hope of recovery.

This was the end of the affray, and with sorrowful hearts the Boers took toll of their losses. Two of their number—Pieter Botha and young Nicholas Potgieter—were dead, and about a dozen others, including one or two women, had *assegai* wounds. Two hundred of the blacks were lying killed or wounded round the *lager* and in the bush. Those still alive were at once despatched. What else could be done with them? But the victory had been dearly won. Deprived of their oxen Potgieter's party could not move, and unless they were speedily relieved by other bodies of trekkers their plight was desperate. At all hazards they must make the attempt to get back some of their cattle.

How this was effected cannot be told here, for we are concerned with the Matabele. But the fighting spirit of the sturdy *voor-trekkers* was

aroused, and they swore that day that, come what might, they would never rest till they had driven the black vermin out of the 'land of Canaan,' which they had resolved to make their own.

Chapter V

THE NORTHWARD MARCH

The return of Kalipi's regiments with their magnificent booty—hundreds of red cattle, white cattle, black cattle, all twice as big as the native beasts—dispelled any misgivings which the Matabele King might have about further trouble from the Boers. The cattle were what weighed most with him, but the exaggerated accounts his warriors gave as to the numbers of men and women they had wiped out also helped to convince him that the intrusions of wandering parties of white men from the south were scotched for good and all. His previous triumphs over the weak Bechuana tribes had given him an inflated sense of his own strength, and he failed to comprehend that the white men were made of different metal. In a rare outburst of generosity he granted to each of the unmarried soldiers leave to take a wife from among the numerous slave girls captured in previous forays. To their leader he offered two wives, any that he might like to pick, but he was surprised when Kalipi at once asked that he might have the white girls seized from Liebenburg's *lager*. These two captives, who were about eight and ten years

old, he had placed in charge of Nyumbakazi, one of his wives, who had never borne him children, and had in consequence been degraded to a menial position. The third child, a boy, was a puny, sickly fellow, and Mziligazi had ordered him to be knocked on the head.

" Why do you ask for them ? " he said. " Why do you not take girls you can marry at once ? These children are too young to wed. Besides, they are ugly brats with their long hair and pale skins. People will mock at you and call you *Indoda yombuzi* (the husband of goats)."

" *Nkos*," replied Kalipi, " I have a fancy for these two girls. That is why I saved them when the others were killed. I will wait for them, and while I am waiting you shall send me out to get more cattle for my King."

" Very well," said Mziligazi. " If you choose to wait for them you can have them. Nobody else wants them, and we shall never see any more of their tribe. None will dare again to come within reach of the lion's claws."

But he had sadly misjudged the temper of the resolute *voor-trekkers*. The outrages at the Vaal river only made them more determined to seize the country they had discovered, and it was not long before Potgieter succeeded in replacing the stolen cattle and in rallying the straggling parties into an organised commando. He enlisted the aid of some of the Griquas and other half-breeds, who had

horses and could use fire-arms, and six weeks later marched with a strong force against Mziligazi's headquarters at Mosega. The tables were turned on the Matabele, who could make no stand against the sharpshooters. Potgieter and his Boers defeated them with heavy loss, and returned exultant at having recovered the bulk of their cattle, and well satisfied with the bloody vengeance they had exacted for the murder of their fellow-countrymen. Of the white children, however, they had gained no tidings, and they gave them up as lost.

And now a new actor appeared upon the scene. Dingaan, the assassin and successor of the Zulu tyrant Tshaka, who had been watching and waiting for an opportunity to pay off old scores against Mziligazi, chose this moment to launch an army of Zulus to attack him. And then, while they were reeling under the assaults of their former fellow-tribesmen, the Boers made another lightning swoop on the luckless Matabele and inflicted a second crushing defeat upon them, burning their great *kraal* and other villages, and forcing them to take refuge in the neighbouring hills and bush-veld.

It began to dawn upon Mziligazi that there might be stronger forces than the hitherto invincible Matabele, and, as soon as he could collect his scattered army, he called a council of his principal *indunas* to decide upon the next move. And first he questioned Umnombata, his chief adviser, whom he had sent to Capetown two years previously,

and who had there entered into a " treaty of friendship " with the British Governor.

" These white men who have come against us with their fire tubes—are they all here or are there any more left in Capetown ? "

" My father," said Umnombata earnestly, " these men here are only a little tribe. In Capetown they are so many that they cannot be counted. And there they have much greater fire tubes, as thick as the trunk of a tree, and when they use them the noise is like thunder."

" But the paper you told me about, that which you put a mark upon, and which you said meant peace and friendship between my people and the white men. Were you lying to me, or does the great *induna* at Capetown say one thing and mean another ? It looks to me as if he has made a fool of you."

" These people that have come against us are not the same people, my father. They do not even speak the same tongue. These are some which have broken away, as we broke away from Tshaka long ago. The people who made the writing are those that obey that new woman ruler, the Queen, who lives in a distant country but is feared by all the English in Capetown."

" Then why does not this Queen send her soldiers to prevent these wolves from coming to my country to attack me ? "

" I do not know, King. But it seems to me that the ones who have seized our cattle and burnt our

town are not of the same breed as the Queen's people. They are great rough men with long beards and sand-coloured coats. The soldiers of the Queen that I saw were of a different tribe, and wore red coats. Their *impis* moved on foot, as we do, and only a few rode on horses like these, who send their fire balls at us and then ride back out of reach."

Mziligazi reflected a few minutes ; then, turning to his captains, he put to them the question that was in his mind :

" Shall we stay and wait for more to come, or shall we seek a new country where they cannot follow us ? "

" Let us stay and fight again," said Kalipi; " we can steal upon them at night and rip open their stomachs before they get their guns ready."

" No," said others. " They are like locusts. If we kill a few more will come, and more still, and every time they will kill some of our people, and soon there will be no more of us left."

Kalipi became indignant. " Are we dogs then that run away if someone throws a stone ? " Then turning to the King he made a strong appeal : " Do not wait for them to move again, my father. Let me take all the young men to-night and surround these few white men when they are asleep with their women in their *kraal* of waggons and then—*jiya !* We shall rush in and cut their throats."

The King looked at Umnombata, whose attention

seemed to be wandering, for his eyes were turned towards a mound of earth a little distance away. Suddenly he rose, walked to the spot and gazed intently on the ground. Then he beckoned to the others. They came and saw a long string of soldier ants, the kind that they call *mateza*, emerging from a crevice in the rocks and crawling steadily forward to seek some prey. He took a flat stone and crashed it down on the leaders, leaving some dozens of dead and wriggling bodies; but the others came on without faltering or turning aside. Again and again he brought down the stone until there were hundreds crushed, and still the remainder continued their steady advance in a column which seemed endless. Umnombata looked up and saluted the King.

"That is my answer, *Nkos*. Kalipi and his warriors may kill those white men that are here now, and the next party, and the next, but there will always be more to follow. The white men have found our country and nothing will stop them from entering it."

Mziligazi was visibly impressed.

"After all," he said at length, "there is not much left for us in this country. We have taken what there is to take and can gain nothing by stopping. So let us move on to the north, across the great river where the white men cannot follow. A few soldiers shall stop behind for a while to spy and see what these accursed white men intend to do. The

rest of us will go forward and look for new hunting-grounds."

And so the decision was taken.

In those days Africa beyond the Limpopo, or, as some call it, the 'Crocodile,' river was a sealed book. On old maps one would find the word MONOMOTAPA sprawled in bold print half across the continent, and to compensate for lack of further geographical detail empty spaces were filled with pictures of elephants, camelopards and palm trees. A few delvers into history might know that 'Monomotapa' was the name of the half-fabulous kingdom whose gold and silver mines and ancient stone cities were a constant lure to the Portuguese of the 16th century, but to the ordinary man the word, if not quite meaningless, was merely recalled as the label of one of those African myths to which belonged Prester John, the Land of Ophir and the Mountains of the Moon.

When Victoria came to the throne no single white man had penetrated farther north than the head-waters of the Limpopo river. David Livingstone, who was to point the way to the famous company of British explorers of the 19th century, was still a student at Glasgow. Rider Haggard, who fifty years later was to kindle the spark of African adventure in British youth, was unborn. Nobody knew what lay beyond the narrow limits of civilisation and nobody sought to know. The Boer *voor-trekkers*, who sallied into the wilderness like the children of Israel, were not impelled by a thirst for exploration

but simply by the longing to escape from what they regarded as oppression, and so ignorant were they of distance and latitude that when, after months of wandering, they lighted upon a river flowing in a northerly direction, they thought they must have reached the Nile, and named it accordingly.

Even native tradition was silent as to what lay beyond the Limpopo, and when Mziligazi and his people headed for the north, they merely chose the path of least resistance, without suspecting that they would come upon a land of rich pastures and perennial streams, with new opportunities for plunder and rapine.

Chapter VI

THE WIZARD

Mziligazi had often heard from wandering Bushmen vague rumours of a great river, somewhere in the north, many days' journey ahead, and he now determined to make for it, and by crossing to interpose an effective barrier between his own people and the plague of white intruders from Cape Colony. To this plan, hastily taken at a time of great stress, he adhered with dogged resolution in spite of opposition from his own councillors, and in the face of unimagined physical hardships. Unfortunately he was forced to start when the rainy season was at its height, and the long column had to make frequent deviations to find fording-places across the swollen streams. Mziligazi had with him two waggons which had been saved from destruction at Liebenburg's camp. One of these he kept for his own use and for carrying the valuable store of elephants' tusks gained in his raiding expeditions, and the other was allotted to his 'great wife,' who rode on it with her son Nkulumana. All other women, and such children as were old enough, had to trudge along on foot—among them the two white girls and the little boy Lobengula,

whom we last saw as an infant in arms. He now had a sister, Ningi, who, being too small to walk, was carried pick-a-back by her mother. The men moved at first in battle formation, parties being sent ahead and to either flank to forage and reconnoitre, but as the days passed they gradually drew together and shambled along in an ever-lengthening column. The nearer they approached the Limpopo river the more arduous became the route. One day they would be hacking their way through dense ' camel-thorn ' bushes, and another floundering through black swamps swarming with mosquitoes and other venomous insects. At times they found themselves in country abounding with antelopes and other large game, but the Matabele were inexpert hunters except when human beings were their quarry, and of these but few were encountered. Unable to loot grain they had to subsist largely on berries and roots. Disease broke out and claimed many victims, especially among the women and children. Their feet were broken and cut by the sharp stones of the *kopjes* and the razor-like reeds of the river-banks. Never a day passed without one or more of the wretched women dropping behind from exhaustion. In such cases not the slightest effort was made to help them. They were left to die a lingering death from starvation, unless, as generally happened, they were mercifully killed at once by beasts of prey. In the daytime their progress was watched by vultures ready to swoop down upon any that fell by the

wayside. At their nightly halts they were harassed by lions, which raided their cattle and robbed them of their rest.

What was it that kept them together and prevented them from deserting? Simply the habit of obedience to the iron will of their King, in whose hands they had become machines. For no defaulters were tolerated. At the slightest murmur or sign of insubordination he gave the order for execution, and the guilty one was clubbed to death. From sheer inability to break away, the tribe—men, women and children alike—followed him blindly and submissively, believing that he knew best and praying for the end.

The children died like flies. The wonder is that any survived at all. The younger of the Dutch girls died of dysentery long before they reached the Limpopo. The other, whose skin had become so dark from dirt and exposure that she was only distinguishable from the natives by her long fair hair, was tough and well-developed. Though she only knew as yet a smattering of their language, she was well liked by the other women, for she was always ready to help carry a tired child or fetch wood for the fire. They had found out that her name was Sara and always called her by it. Her own people, who had all been massacred, were quickly fading into a mere memory; at any rate she had ceased to mourn for them. But her motherly instincts led her to befriend all the miserable little piccanins who shared the agony of that long trail.

One evening she came upon a young woman stretched on the side of the track in the last stage of exhaustion, but still clutching in her feeble arms a tiny puling girl who was vainly trying to draw nourishment from her flaccid breast. Near her was a small boy who sat on the ground gravely regarding her dying throes. Other women passed by without taking much notice. They had themselves to think of, and the sight was too familiar to create any solicitude. The only interested spectators were a brace of hideous vultures, which flopped about in the branches of a neighbouring tree, greedily expectant of the meal which would soon be ready.

Sara had a calabash of *amasi*, or curdled milk, which she held to the woman's lips, but she was too far gone to swallow. Her baby cried out for it and gulped it down with avidity. Four or five other women and some men came near and had a look. They noted her black skirt of bullock's hide embroidered with beads. " It is Fulata, the Swazi woman," one said, " the King's wife, and these two are Lobengula his son and Ningi his daughter. But if we tell the King his wife is dead he will think we have killed her. Let us leave her to the vultures, and the child too," and they hurried on without another glance at the group, deeming it unlucky to meddle. Sara alone remained, and when the others had passed she hoisted Ningi on to her own skinny shoulders, took the boy by the hand and plodded on. She brought both children to her adopted

mother, Nyumbakazi, and related what had happened. From that time onward Lobengula and his sister had more attention than any children in the whole tribe. Two mothers waited on them—Nyumbakazi, the barren woman, and Sara, the Dutch girl. When others were starved they were well looked after, and at the end of the long journey the boy was the strongest and best nourished of any that survived.

Following the north bank of the Limpopo the fugitive army came at last to a flooded river too deep and swift to cross—the Mzingwani; they therefore turned up the stream, keeping it on their right, but after several days' marching found themselves in country so rugged and broken that there seemed no possible outlet. They spent another week struggling through dense *mopani* forest and along precipitous gorges only to find themselves more and more hopelessly involved in the labyrinthine defiles of the Matopo mountains. There came a day when even Mziligazi, whose resolution so far had never faltered, seemed at a loss to know what step to take next. In front loomed a dome-shaped granite hill whose summit was crowned with a ring composed of half a dozen immense boulders, each several times as big as a native hut.

"Let us go up there," said the King, "and perhaps we shall see a way out." Just before sunset, after an exhausting climb, he stood with some of his *indunas* in the centre of the circle of boulders, and all

scanned the surrounding country. As far as their eyes could reach there was a sea of tumbled granite ; hill upon hill of grey weather-beaten crags standing out from gloomy *kloofs* and dark patches of forest trees. Heavy clouds were piling up overhead, and it was clear that the usual evening thunder-storm was about to break. There was something about these great boulders that was terrifying. Had they been good Catholics they would have crossed themselves ; as it was they shivered in the cooling air and glanced uneasily over their shoulders.

" Do not tarry here, my father," said Umnombata. " I fear some evil thing will happen to us."

Even as he spoke there was a sound of altercation below them, and from a recess in the rocks two of the Matabele soldiers appeared, dragging by the wrists the strange figure of a gaunt native, whose short grizzled chin beard, bald head and parched and wrinkled skin showed him to be well on in years. From a thong round his neck hung four oblong ivory tablets carved with grotesque symbolic patterns, the inflated bladder of some small animal and an assortment of birds' beaks, leopards' claws, small tortoise-shells and other ' amulets.' His only garment was a long strip of filthy hide, soft with age and use, hanging from a waistbelt of snake-skin, and in one hand he clutched a staff, on the top of which was fixed—of all strange ornaments—the cut glass stopper of an old-fashioned decanter. With such strength as he possessed he strove to break away,

screaming out what sounded like horrible curses. He was brought up to the King and forced down on his knees. His struggles subsided, but he poured out a stream of unfamiliar words. " *Mlimo ! Mlimo ! Ngwali ! Ngwali !* " he kept on repeating.

" Where did you find him ? " said Mziligazi.

" Skulking away into a cave, *Nkos*," replied one of the soldiers. " We saw others running but they were too swift to catch. This one alone, being old, could not get away. Shall we kill him, my father ? "

The old man continued to babble in a strange tongue.

" Does anyone understand him ? " said the King, looking round at those who thronged behind, for quite a number of men had come up, curious to see what was happening.

One of the bystanders, a slave, who had been carrying a large basket of goats' flesh, prostrated himself and spoke.

" I understand him a little, Great One. His words are like the words of my own people, the Basuto. He says he is a man from God."

" Ask him where his village is, and whether there is any path out of these evil mountains."

A long colloquy ensued between the Basuto slave and the prisoner, while the King listened with growing impatience. At length the interpreter addressed the King.

" *Nkos !* He says the people of this country are the Makalanga, the children of the Sun, and this hill

is called Mlindidzimo. But none of the tribe live near it except himself and his family, for they are afraid of the ghosts of their chiefs, who are all buried round this spot. Only the great ones of the nation lie here, *Nkos*, those that have deserved well of their country. The spirits will not molest him, *Nkos*, for he is Ngwali, their friend. But others only come here when they want the spirits to help them, and then they bring gifts ; and they cannot talk to the spirits themselves, *Nkos*, but only through Ngwali ; and the voice of the spirits speaks to them out of the caverns in the rocks. Yes, *Nkos*."

Neither Mziligazi nor any of his people concerned themselves very seriously about spirits. Their lives had been too full of earthly materialism to allow much time for attention to supernatural matters. But although they shirked such questions, and avoided discussing them, they were, like all African savages, profoundly credulous on subjects connected with magic and sorcery, and the words of this old Kalanga wizard, uttered as they were in such uncanny surroundings, stirred in all a feeling of vague apprehension and misgiving. This reached a climax when an unexpected and terrific clap of thunder burst over them and echoed and reverberated through the granite *kopjes*. As it died away a hollow unearthly voice issued from the rocks just behind the prisoner—where no man stood.

"*Wafa! Wafa! Baleka!* (You are dead men! Run !)" it seemed to say.

Was it their imagination or did it really speak in the Zulu language? The boldest of them quailed, and some, filled with sudden panic, fled helter-skelter down the hill. Even Mziligazi momentarily lost his usual calm, and began to shout out excited orders.

"The way out!" he cried. "Tell him to show us the way out! He shall be well rewarded if he takes us away from this ghost-ridden spot. I will give him an ox—two oxen if he will guide us to safety."

The old man was helped to rise, and though his arms were still held he was treated now with more gentleness. He had brightened up considerably, and seemed quite cheerful as he pointed to the valley below and prepared to lead the way.

It was not the first time he had exercised his ventriloquial gifts.

Chapter VII

THE GREAT RIVER

As the foremost soldiers of the Matabele army filed out through the narrow gorge at the edge of the Matopo range, the morning sun burst through the rain-clouds, bathing the air with steamy brilliance. What a sight met their eyes! Before them stretched an undulating park-like expanse of tall waving grass, broken only by occasional mimosa trees, and the lean and travel-worn soldiers gave a shout of relief. The cry was taken up by those in rear, and soon the *kloofs* and ravines for miles behind them resounded with the echoes of excited voices calling back the good tidings. Startled at the strange sounds a mixed herd of zebras and gnus sprang up from an unseen resting-place. Standing for a moment at gaze they wheeled round and halted; then broke into a trot and passed out of view. A pair of burly rhinoceros rose almost at the feet of the leading men and with angry snorts followed suit, and in every direction antelopes, large and small, which had been couched in the long grass, appeared, as if by magic, and dashed away to safety.

The first comers at the mouth of the pass were

pressed forward by an ever-growing crowd from behind, and in a few minutes the margin of the plain was alive with hundreds of gaping, chattering savages, their bodies still glistening with the moisture from the bushes through which they had been forcing their way. At last Mziligazi stepped out and the rest made room for him. He gave a curt order and with an escort of *indunas* stalked ahead, the wizard and his attendant guards following, while the remainder fell automatically into their old crescent formation, waving their *assegais*, rattling their shields and chanting their monotonous war-song. After the climbing and scrambling of the last few days the going seemed easy, and they moved by short stages with frequent stoppages, so that long before night-fall the women and camp-followers caught them up and the tribe was once more united. By the following midday they reached some rising ground where several streams flowing north and south had their source, and here, near the foot of a great solitary flat-topped hill rising sheer above the plain, Mziligazi called a halt and gave instructions for the building of a town. This was the first resting-place of the Matabele in the land which they were to ravage for half a century.

The vicissitudes of the long march from Mosega had taught the King how hopeless it was to move rapidly when encumbered by women, children and cattle, but rapid progress was vital to his plans, for he still hankered for a country where he could make

certain of finding natives to despoil. The place they had reached was all very well for people who were content to till the soil and settle down in peace, but the chief essential was lacking. The Matabele tradition demanded fighting and human fodder, and until that was attained he would never be content. After seeing the new town started therefore, and allowing the army a few days' rest, he bade Umnombata bring forward the wizard of the Matopo hills, who had been carefully detained as a prisoner, and through the slave interpreter he questioned him closely. Ngwali's cunning enabled him quickly to discern what was in the King's mind, and he thought that by painting an attractive picture he could tempt him to move on and leave the Makalanga tribes unharassed.

" Beyond the Leeambye (Zambesi)," said he, " there are villages so numerous that they cannot be counted. In every village there is a herd of fat cattle. The men do nothing but hunt and fish. They have no need to kill oxen for they always have the meat of buffaloes. They have many wives to make beer for them. The corn grows there without being tended. Their King has a great store of ivory, for elephants are as plentiful as hares. Yes, my master, it is a good country."

" So they have a King then," said Mziligazi.

" Yes, Great One, their King is Sebitoane, of the Makololo tribe, who came from Kuruman many moons ago, and he has eaten up all the chiefs near the river."

Mziligazi chuckled and slapped his naked thighs with fierce glee. " That is the man who gave us the slip once before in the Bechuana country, and took some of my cattle. Good ! This time he shall not escape. I will follow him and get back the cattle. I will teach him who is the greater, he or I." And he proceeded to describe with obscene detail the tortures which he would inflict. " What say you ? " he continued, turning to Umnombata.

The councillor urged delay ; pointed out that the army had been on the move for months and sorely needed rest. " Stay here for one season, my father, that we may get back our strength, plough the land and reap crops. Next year we shall be fit to go on to the Great River."

" You shall stay here, old *jigatuvi* (dung-beetle)," the King answered, " and look after the women and grow crops. The regiments of married men shall stay here also, but I will take two divisions—the Kanda (guides) and the Mnyama (those with the black shields). We shall make for the Great River and seek out Sebitoane, and when I have eaten him up, then you and the rest of my people shall come on and join me."

So it was decided, and orders were given at once to prepare for the fresh adventure. The women were set to work to make new sandals, the men to sharpen their *assegais*, to kill buck and to cut up strips of meat to dry in the sun. Detachments were sent out to look for grain and cattle, and after a good deal of

searching they found some small villages which they plundered and burnt, forcing the wretched inhabitants to carry the grain to the new town, after which they were put to death without compunction or waste of time. Only moderate sport this, and not what the Matabele were accustomed to, but the natives of this part of the country were few and far between. Most of them in fact had already had warning of the invasion, and had taken flight with all their worldly goods. But Mziligazi reckoned on getting supplies by the way, as he had always done before. He was itching to be off, and the young *matjaha*, to whom he held out glowing prospects of the rich country ahead, were as eager for fresh exploits, now that they were rested, as the King himself.

Early in May, with high hopes, five thousand fighting men set forth once more into the unknown. But long before they reached the Great River, Sebitoane knew all about them and made his plans.

At Mhlahlanhlela (' Clear the road ')—that was the name given to the new town, after their old military *kraal* in Zululand—all at first was quiet. There was plenty of occupation—cattle-posts to be built ; land to be broken for crops, foraging parties to be sent out, a thousand matters to be attended to, but it was a dull life on the whole compared with the good old rollicking times in the south, and signs of restlessness were not long in appearing. After the first few months, during which they got a scrap

of news now and then, delivered by a messenger from the army or by a stray Kalanga from the north, no word of their King reached them, and, when a whole year passed without a sign, rumours began to float about that he had gone for good and forsaken them. Umnombata's assurances to the contrary carried no conviction. Wise in council, he lacked the personality and influence of his master. He was not strong enough to punish the unruly with death, as Mziligazi always did, and he possessed no authority over the other *indunas*, many of whom regarded themselves as his equals. His efforts to check the growing uneasiness were received with ill grace, and at last the feeling against him grew so strong that he was driven away with his family and forced to build new quarters at a distance, near the Matopo hills. Meanwhile the great *kraal* was seething with dissensions and the intrigues of jealous rivals, some urging one course and some another, with no one of sufficient weight to assume command. At last a suggestion was put about—no one knew exactly by whom—that they should take their troubles to the oracle of the Matopos, and this idea caught the popular fancy. Once more old Ngwali was dragged out of durance and interrogated. He pleaded that he could not help them except in the actual presence of the spirits, and finally, with some trepidation, a few of the leaders consented to accompany him to his old retreat amid the mysterious fastnesses which were said to be haunted by the shades of the departed.

It was a glorious chance for the sorcerer to show off his powers, and one that he had long been hoping for. It seemed to provide him with a further opportunity to clear the country for good of these odious intruders, and he drew on all his resources in order to make the most of it. Arrived at Mlindidzimo, the great bald hill in the heart of the mountains, he gave a full demonstration of his magic hocus-pocus, keeping the *indunas* on tenterhooks of suspense for some hours while he threw the 'bones,' muttered incantations, and burnt strange objects in a fire. Finally, towards sunset, he announced that the oracle was about to speak, and sure enough the same dread voice issued from the mouth of a cave, speaking this time in unmistakable Zulu words so that all could understand :

" *Your King calls you. He has eaten up the River King and seized his country. All must join him, and death will come to those who hold back.*"

With hearts in their mouths and knees a-tremble the gaping *indunas* listened. These hardened warriors, who would have gazed unmoved at the most revolting butcheries, quaked like little children at contact with the supernatural. The air seemed full of whispers, and when the unearthly laugh of a hyena suddenly sounded just behind them their nerves gave way utterly ; they jumped to their feet and stared into the darkness in terror. When they had recovered a little of their composure and looked round for the wizard, lo ! he was gone ! He had

slipped into the shadows while the attention of the others was distracted by the ghostly hyena, whose mocking cachinnation was heard again, dying away into the distance.

When they reached home and related their experiences they found that no one paid heed to them. The town was buzzing with a new report brought by some Bushmen from the north, so circumstantial and full of detail that it left little room for doubt. The army—so the story ran—had fallen into an elaborate trap prepared by the cunning Sebitoane, who had placed some calves on one of the large islands in the Zambesi as a decoy to attract the invaders, and had left a number of his men with canoes on the south bank of the river to assist in the plot. Mziligazi had seized the canoe men and, mistaking the island for the opposite bank of the river, had compelled them to ferry the army across. When all had disembarked the canoe men had stolen away, leaving the Matabele to their fate. Cut off from the mainland and unable to swim they had gradually starved, and when only a few emaciated survivors remained Sebitoane's warriors landed and flung them to the crocodiles.

Of this dire calamity the Bushmen claimed to have been eye-witnesses, and, though there were some weak spots in their narrative, it was accepted as gospel. Here at last was a definite situation to be faced. Their King was dead. Very well, they must find another.

Chapter VIII

NTABA YEZINDUNA

(' *The Mountain of the Headmen* ')

We have already seen something of Mziligazi's ' great wife ' and her first-born, Nkulumana. She also had a second son, Ubuhlelo, and these two lads were accounted highest in rank in the royal house. By his many wives of lower degree, the King had a numerous progeny, the most important being Lobengula and his sister Ningi,[1] whose mother Fulata—she that died on the road—belonged to the family of a big chief in Swaziland.

Nkulumana, now a well-grown lad of seventeen who had already given promise of becoming a stout soldier, was, subject to acceptance by the nation, the heir to his father, and it was to him that men's thoughts naturally turned. The *indunas* held meetings and discussed the succession in all its bearings. They were not entirely unanimous, for one or two still clung to the hope that Mziligazi might be alive, and were apprehensive of trouble if they acted precipitately. At the last moment, indeed,

[1] Her real name was Mncencengi, which in later years Europeans found so hard to pronounce that the contracted form was adopted.

Umnombata ventured back, threw doubt on the Bushmen's story and made a powerful appeal for delay. But his prestige was gone ; his intervention only damaged his own case, and he was driven away with gibes and insults. By a large majority it was decided to adopt Nkulumana, and Skwalibani, who had arrogated the rôle of Regent and had already marked out for himself the position of Chief Councillor, arranged for a gathering of the whole nation and a parade of the army to take place at the festival of the garnering of the harvest, when the young man would be solemnly and formally proclaimed and invested as King of the Matabele.

Nowhere did this decision cause more stir than in the royal harem, which had been placed in charge of Umnombata, the only man with the right of entry. Since his expulsion, and in the continued absence of their lord and master, the behaviour of the inmates had become lax. Several scandals had occurred, and one of the women had actually absconded with a lover. Now that they were ' widows ' their discipline was still further loosened, and there was confusion and disorder. By Zulu custom the heir of a deceased chief is the guardian of his father's wives so long as they remain unmarried, but Nkulumana's youth rendered him unequal to this responsibility, and the control which he should have exercised was usurped by Umoaka, his mother, the ' great wife ' of his father. This woman was detested by the others on

account of her arrogance, and in her new position she became more than ever overbearing and insolent. Her spitefulness was displayed with special force against Lobengula and his sister Ningi, who, with Sara the Dutch girl and Nyumbakazi the barren 'queen,' formed a little group by themselves. Matters came to a head one day when she found Lobengula playing with one of her younger children in the enclosure of her private quarters. Catching hold of the boy, she began thrashing him with a *sjambok*, which she snatched from one of her slaves. His screams were heard by Sara, who rushed to his assistance and, being a strong wiry girl, succeeded in dragging him away. The enraged queen poured out a torrent of coarse abuse.

"You shall suffer for this, you yellow frog! I will have you killed—you and the wretched Swazi brat as well! I will tell my son, the King, and he will have you both thrown to the crocodiles."

"Seize them," she added, turning to the slave, "and bind them with *reims*."

But Sara was too quick. Before the slave had time to obey she grasped Lobengula by the hand and ran with him to the opening of the stockade. Pausing there an instant, she turned and showed that she was a match for Umoaka in bad language as well as in activity.

"The crocodiles will have you and your son before they get us, you offspring of a snake!" she shrieked. "Everyone knows you are a witch and a *febe*

(adulteress), and the ghost of Mziligazi will wreak vengeance on you."

With these Parthian shots she fled into the bush with the boy, and the women's quarters saw her no more.

But this incident attracted little attention outside, for all were now engrossed in the preparations for the great ceremony.

Like most of the leading *indunas* Skwalibani had a *kraal* of his own, outside the main town and close to the great flat-topped hill—a village in itself, with huts for his wives and numerous retainers, grain bins, and pens for his cattle and goats, the whole enclosed by a substantial fence of reeds. Here, on the eve of the great day, the principal king-makers were squatting round a fire in the courtyard in confabulation with the Regent. Nkulumana was not among them, as it would have been unseemly for one who would shortly rule the tribe to be in evidence immediately before his accession. They were earnestly discussing the plans for the next day, the selection of oxen to be slaughtered, the supply of *utshuala* (beer) and the disposition of the army. All day long messengers had been arriving and departing with orders, and now everything was settled, and, to the accompaniment of much snuff and copious libations of beer, the new officers of state were exchanging congratulations.

Skwalibani was, of course, the man of the moment, and his crafty pock-marked face wore a self-satisfied

grin as he listened to the flattery which the others heaped on him. In reality they hated him, but, like all African natives, they were adepts at disguising their real feelings. Inflated with self-importance, he could not resist giving a few final instructions, to which the others listened with the gravity due to his station.

" You, Mafuta, will first lead up your Mhlope division (' the white shields ') and you, Nyamazana, will follow with the Sigaba (town guard). Thrice will you give the *gubagubo* (rattling of the shields), and then take up your positions to the right and to the left, so as to leave a wide track between you for the oxen. I shall be standing beside the young King, and when I give the signal——" He stopped, for something had caught his eye, and he looked intently towards the great hill whose dark outline could be distinctly seen against the night sky. The others turned in the same direction.

" What fires are those ? " he asked sharply, as first one then another little tongue of flame flickered up from the blackness.

" The grass is dry and burns," said one.

" Maybe some soldiers have made a camp and are sleeping there," said another. " They are crowded at the great *kraal* and have to go far to find a place to rest."

But Skwalibani was not satisfied. " There is shelter for all round the King's cattle *kraal*. Nyamazana, do you send out messengers at once to find out

who they are that light fires, and bid them get back to their lines. See, there is another! And another!"

"I myself will go," said the one addressed, and rose from the ground.

At that moment the sound of singing came to them, faintly over the breeze—they could distinguish some of the words :

> " . . . *There's work to do at Matshobane's,*
> *Work for assegais. . . .* "

"It is the battle-song of the Mnyama (black shields)," cried Skwalibani. "What does it mean? Can it be their *madhlozi* (ghosts) ? "

All jumped to their feet. Skwalibani rushed to the entrance of the stockade and flung wide the gate. There in the opening stood a tall figure with black-plumed head-dress and a black shield, the uniform of the Mnyama division. The blades of the *assegais* in his hand glinted in the light of the fire ; his eyeballs showed white.

"You ? Kalipi ? " cried Skwalibani hoarsely, and his knees gave under him as he staggered back a step.

"Mziligazi has need of you," was the reply. "Come ! "

The tall figure stood aside and a score or more of others, all with black shields and head-dresses, came forward out of the gloom.

"Take them all," was the order, "and bring them to the King."

One by one the *indunas* were led out, each held by two soldiers.

. . . . . .

The Bushmen had not lied with their story of the island and the canoes—only exaggerated, and that unconsciously. What they thought to be the whole army was merely a detachment. The bulk of the army had not been concerned. But other causes had hastened their return and, on his way south, Mziligazi had met messengers from Umnombata telling him what was on foot at the great *kraal*. Now he had arrived with all his fighting men—secretly, of course, but before the night was spent the news became known to the whole nation. They were torn between relief and apprehension; but probably relief was uppermost.

. . . . . .

It was a vast concourse that massed next day round the base of the long mountain. The serried ranks of the army stretched in two great horns on either side; within was a semi-circle of kneeling *indunas* and old men, and around them the women of the King's household—all but the 'great wife.' These were the official spectators; the common people were herded in rear. Towering a hundred feet or so in front was a precipitous cliff, one of the spurs of the mountain, straight and sheer like a wall, and presently on its summit a party of soldiers was espied leading some prisoners bound with hide thongs. Immediately below them was an immense flat

boulder forming a platform, and close to the outer edge of this was a rough wooden stool.

A small procession advanced up the broad path between the two wings of the army—first a few capering buffoons running backwards and forwards, shaking castanets and shouting out the usual compliments paid to the King—" Eater of men ! " " Great Black Calf ! " " Stabber of the Sun ! " and other extravagant phrases. Then came a string of girls bearing smoking platters of beef and pots of beer for the King's delectation. The commanders of regiments followed, all in full war dress, with Kalipi at their head, and after them the Councillors, led by Umnombata, whom no one had seen for months—none walking straight ahead, but moving by short side-steps, singing with low voices and always looking to the rear. Last of all marched the King, and at sight of him the whole multitude fell on their knees and clapped their hands, the soldiers alone remaining erect and rigid. He walked up to the stool, turned and faced his people. With one vast roar came the Royal Salute, " *Bayete !* "

Mziligazi seated himself and gave a sign to Kalipi, who shouted an order to those on the cliff. There was a slight movement there, and then a human body came hurtling down and landed with a thud on the flat rock. The thongs burst apart, but the limbs remained motionless. All craned forward eagerly to see.

" It is Skwalibani ! " they shouted, and as the

words left their lips there was the thud of another victim, and then others in quick succession. Most were recognised and their names passed round the crowd. " That's Dwanu ! Nyamazana now ! And there's old Mafuta ! " Eighteen in all were hurled over. The rock was spattered with blood and entrails, and here and there was a feebly-moving limb.

The King remained impassive, devouring his beef and swallowing great draughts of beer. But his subjects gloated over the horrible spectacle and yelled with hideous mirth when wriggles and contortions showed that a poor wretch was not quite dead. Perhaps they should not be judged too critically. There is a streak of cruelty in all humanity. At that very time in England thousands of men and women found exquisite humour in watching the last moments of a condemned man on the scaffold, and two or three centuries earlier the burning alive of martyrs was an entertainment as popular as a divorce trial is to-day.

When all was over the people were roughly ordered to disperse, and the soldiers drove them back towards the town. One by one the elders made their obeisance and withdrew, till only Umnombata was left near the King.

" Where are Nkulumana and his brother ? "

" I have them, my father."

" Do not let me see them again. You know what to do with them ? "

" I know what to do, *Nkos*."

" Then let it be done," and the King rose. Followed at a respectful distance by Umnombata and the generals of his army he walked back to the royal quarters.

That night the jackals at the ' Mountain of the Headmen ' were unusually lively, and their barking and yelling could be heard for miles round.

" Listen ! " whispered one woman to another in the great *kraal*. " The King has given them a fine supper. They know the good old days have come back."

Chapter IX

THE MATOPOS

Far and wide as their ravages extended there was one locality which Mziligazi and his people treated with profound respect, and into which only those who had urgent need of superhuman help were bold enough to venture.

Even civilised folk, with none of the superstitions of the barbarous Matabele, cannot shake off a feeling of awe amid the grim solitudes of the Matopo mountains, which stretch for fifty miles from east to west like a vast jagged scar across the face of the country. No pen-picture can do justice to the riotous grandeur of this extraordinary range, which Nature has constructed in one of her most freakish moods. Huge boulders are balanced in grotesque positions which seem to defy the laws of gravity; grey domes and peaks emerge naked out of a disorder of granite and tangled vegetation through which trickle streams, rising from nowhere and losing themselves in treacherous swamps; on every side are dark and forbidding caverns, half-hidden by the growth of centuries—strumous baobab trees and prickly cactuses with roots straggling down the walls of granite like gouty fingers clutching for

support. The whole effect is of some monstrous rock-garden, built by a forgotten race of giants, whose faces and forms seem to be reproduced in colossal outline in the surrounding cliffs, as though they were still there brooding over their handiwork. One would hardly be surprised to see dragons and other fabulous creatures of the old legends creeping through the undergrowth or sunning themselves on the rocky terraces. In the spell of these overpowering surroundings the dullest mind is struck by a sense of human insignificance, and it is not difficult to understand how the imagination of a man like Rhodes must have been stirred in the contemplation of such a prodigious work of Nature.

The Matabele were not likely to be moved by natural objects, however impressive, but they could not forget the evil portents which marked their first acquaintance with the Matopo mountains—the days spent in groping for a track through the labyrinth of gorges and precipitous defiles ; the ominous utterances of the wizard Ngwali, and the unearthly voice which issued out of the caverns. They invested these hills with sinister associations and regarded them as the abode of gods, or devils—one and the same thing to their savage intelligence. After Ngwali's sensational escape they were still more nervous of meddling with him or his haunts. They gave him a wide berth, and he at once resumed his position as head priest of the ' Great Spirit.'

This vague being had, from time immemorial,

been venerated, under the name of Mlimo, by the Makalanga tribes, who believed it to possess the power of causing sickness and death ; of controlling the weather ; of arranging the success or failure of the crops, and of bringing about victory or defeat in battle. To woo the favour of the Spirit and to consult it in domestic or national crises they had for generations made a practice of visiting the wizard's cave at Njelele in the Matopo hills. They could not hold direct intercourse with Mlimo, but could only make their approaches and tender their propitiatory offerings through the medium of those that guarded the mysteries, and hence the profession of intermediary was a lucrative and influential one. The priests, wizards or prophets—there is no English word which exactly fits them, but they were known to the natives as *Ziwosana*—were a close corporation of five or six in number—men of exceptional ability and intelligence chosen from special families, and before they were deemed competent to practise their occult arts they had to undergo a long course of probation and training. Generally they were skilful ventriloquists and jugglers, had an intimate knowledge of medicinal herbs, poisons and remedies, and were shrewd observers of the weather.

The name 'Ngwali' was not a personal but an official and traditional one, assumed by the head wizard on succeeding to the post. He and his acolytes, with their wives, children and retainers, and a few selected Kalanga families, were the sole

inhabitants of the Matopo mountains. They were not seriously affected by the Matabele invasion, for their supposed connection with the spirits protected them and the rocky fastnesses in which they dwelt, so that, while all around were ravaged and maltreated, they alone continued to enjoy seclusion and immunity from attack. The Matopos were the headquarters of an organisation which spread through all the country now known as Rhodesia, for there were minor oracles, with their attendant magic-mongers, as far east as the Mazoe river and as far north as the Zambesi. All were in touch with one another and acted as secret agents for Ngwali who, by their means, was kept informed of everything that went on, and was enabled to wield an immense influence over tribal affairs. No new chief was appointed, no warlike expedition undertaken, without the advice of the Mlimo, and, as heavy fees in kind were exacted, Ngwali and his colleagues were always prosperous and wealthy.

We have seen how Mziligazi stumbled across the head priest and made use of him, and how some of the *indunas* consulted him during Mziligazi's absence. After his escape only one other prominent Matabele was bold enough to visit him. Umnombata, himself an outcast, but knowing no fear, went in the first instance to try and obtain news of his King. Through Ngwali the old councillor learnt of Mziligazi's safety, and it was Ngwali who put into his hands the means of communicating with the

King. This was an error of judgment on the wizard's part, due to his belief that the news of the plot to set up Nkulumana would strengthen Mziligazi's resolution to remain in the north, but, though it failed in this respect, it had the effect of increasing the confidence which Umnombata felt in his advice.

Ngwali and his assistants were constantly on the watch from the rocks which overlooked the entrances to the hills, so as to be forewarned of the approach of any stranger. By this means they became aware, on a morning shortly before the return of Mziligazi, of the presence in one of the valleys of two children who were at once identified as the Dutch girl and her *protégé* Lobengula. Although it was pure chance that had led them in that direction, Ngwali was thoroughly alive to the importance of getting them into his power. Each might be useful to him at some future date—Sara as a possible bait for white people from the south and the boy as the son of the King and therefore a factor in Matabele politics—and he at once laid his plans to secure them. Careful observation was kept on their movements. They seemed to be wandering without settled purpose, pausing now and then to pick berries or drink at one of the streams, but at length they flung themselves down to rest under the shade of an overhanging rock. Ngwali thereupon sent two of his women to fetch curdled milk and meal, and went himself with others to the spot to make sure that they did not escape him. For some hours the wanderers slept.

When, towards evening, they woke they were startled to find themselves surrounded by a ring of silent watchers, but somewhat reassured to see among them the wizard, whom they had known during his captivity, and from whom they had nothing to fear. Ngwali spoke to them with fair words in their own tongue, offered them food, drink and shelter for the night, and by careful interrogation elicited the story of their ill-treatment and flight.

" You are little bucks that have jumped out of a trap," he told them. " If you return Umoaka will kill you, but if you stop with me in these hills you will be safe, for you will belong to the Great Spirit. Place yourselves in my hands and obey my orders and you shall be unharmed."

The famished children at first thought of nothing but the food, and when, a little later, they were taken to a village and given a hut to sleep in they accepted the situation with complete confidence and without a second thought of the life which they had left behind them at the great *kraal*.

Of what took place there they heard little and cared less. When, as time went on, they picked up a few words of the Kalanga language, they learnt from the women's gossip of the return of Mziligazi and of the vengeance which he had wreaked on those who would have made Nkulumana king ; but deeds of blood were too common in their experience to create more than a passing interest.

And so this little boy on whom so much depended

found a home among the wizards who served Mlimo. Save for occasional visits from Umnombata, who kept a vigilant eye on him and never failed to remind him of his royal birth, he was entirely cut off from his own tribe and family. He escaped the cruel ordeals and exercises by which other Matabele lads were educated for the profession of killing, but nevertheless he grew rapidly in stature, bodily vigour and physique. He became a daring and skilful hunter of game, fleet of foot and expert with the *assegai* and knobkerrie. At the same time his mental faculties were developing in a way which would not have been possible had he remained with his tribe. From infancy his naturally receptive mind had been moulded by constant association with the girl Sara, who, surrounded though she was by sheer animalism, retained some instinctive refinement inherited from her European ancestry, and unconsciously passed it on to her companion.

And another influence was at work upon the boy. Daily intercourse with the wizards and observation of the strange and cunning devices by which they imposed upon the credulous Makalanga filled him with a profound respect for witchcraft. He watched them pretending to foretell the weather by poring over the entrails of disembowelled goats, and, in seasons of drought, extracting heavy bribes from those who came to consult them for interceding with the Great Spirit to send rain. He saw them selling charms to their dupes to bring fertility to

their wives and their cattle, to render them proof against disease and to avert the evil eye. He learnt what a valuable tool this occult knowledge might be made in the hands of those who knew how to turn it to account.

By these two influences the fates were shaping the character of Lobengula for their own ends.

Chapter X

THE CAMP FIRE

HIDDEN away in the recesses of the mountains, in a deep hollow hemmed in on all sides by cliffs and towers of granite, there stood a small native village—merely a cluster of six or seven huts, a goat *kraal* and a few grain bins—and here, on an afternoon in the year 1847, at the time of the ripening of the corn, and ten years after the first arrival of the Matabele, a group of women were excitedly chattering about some unusual event. Conspicuous among them was one whose light-blue eyes and fair hair gathered into a bunch at the nape of her neck proclaimed her European blood, although her skin was tanned swarthy by exposure to the sun and her sole garment was a short skirt of dressed hide like those of the others. She knelt before a large hollowed stone in which she was pounding millet into meal, using a smaller round stone as a pestle, and as she worked she put questions in a subdued voice to those who stood round her.

"What is this you are talking about? Antelopes bearing their young ones in skins on their backs?"

"Yes, *Nkosikazi*," they repeated in low nervous tones, all trying to talk at once. "We have just

seen them moving one by one among the rocks, seeking for a pathway."

" How many were there ? "

" Twenty," said one. " Fifty—a hundred," said others. " If you get up on the rocks over there you will see them for yourself, for they are passing just below."

The white woman rose and walked rapidly to where, a few yards away, there was a recumbent figure huddled in an old *kaross* under the eaves of one of the huts. Stooping, she pulled aside a corner of the skin, revealing a young man asleep.

" Lobengula," she murmured, patting his shoulder, " wake up ! " He sat up drowsily and rubbed his eyes.

" What is it, Sara ? Why do you worry me ? Don't you know I've been hunting all day and want to rest ? "

" Yes, but these Kalanga women are talking of some strange buck passing through the valley, carrying their young on their backs. Let us go and see."

He was wide awake at once and, picking up a knobkerrie and two *assegais* which lay beside him, jumped to his feet. Together they scrambled up the steep slope to where there was a narrow cleft in the rocks—a sort of peep-hole or observation post, commanding a view of the low ground below and of the ridges on the other side. Some of the Kalanga women followed them, but there was barely room

for more than one to look out at once, and the others crouched behind, while Lobengula cautiously scanned the valley.

" There they go ! " said he, after a minute or two. " Look. You can see them down there by the big *tumba* (cream-of-tartar tree) " ; and half a mile away appeared a string of human figures mounted on horseback, laboriously forcing their way through the dense undergrowth. Sara peered over his shoulder and caught sight of them. Vague memories of the past stirred her. She trembled violently and shrunk back.

" They are Boers ! " she whispered. " They are my kin. Keep back or they will see us."

But of that there was no danger, for they were absolutely hidden from the men below who, moreover, were heading away from them and were soon lost to view in the bush.

The two young people drew back and looked anxiously at one another. The other women had scrambled down into the hollow by the huts.

" What do they seek, think you ? " said the youth. " Cattle, or game, or women ? "

" I cannot say, but they must have some evil purpose."

" I will go and seek Ngwali. He will ask the Spirit, who will tell us where these people come from and what they want."

" Stay a minute," said the woman. " What if Ngwali already knows of their coming ? Often he

has said to me, ' Some day your people will come and take you away.' Have you not noticed of late how he goes every day to the look-out on Inugu hill and keeps his eyes fixed towards the south, as if he expected some stranger to come ? And where has he been all to-day and all yesterday ? Perhaps he has himself sent for them to come and kill Mziligazi, so that the Makalanga may get back their country. But Umnombata must be told, and at once. Therefore my counsel is that you should go quickly to his village to-night and tell him what we have seen. He will know best what to do."

For some minutes Lobengula looked at her without speaking.

" Will you go with these people of your tribe if they seek to take you away ? " he said at last.

" Why should I want to leave my friends ? " said she. " I have watched over you since you were able to walk. Am I to forsake you and go to strangers ? "

They were now back in the hollow. Lobengula went into his hut and returned immediately with a pair of sandals. The afternoon was drawing on and, though he knew the way to Umnombata's village, it was a journey of several hours by a steep and difficult track. He ran lightly to a narrow outlet at the lower edge of the hollow, and before passing through looked back and held up the *assegai* he carried in his hand.

" *Sala guhle* (stay in peace)," he cried.

" *Hamba guhle* (depart in peace), son of Mziligazi,"

she replied, and turned back towards her grinding-stones.

For an hour the lad sped nimbly along through the deepening shadows of the mountain track. The moon was nearly full and the evening was a still one. The subdued gurgling of a few frogs and the occasional yelp of a distant jackal were the only sounds that broke the silence. As he ran he pondered over the reasons for the coming of these strangers, and recalled Ngwali's words repeated by Sara : " Some day your people will come and take you away."

" Never," thought he ; " I will kill her before they shall have her."

He was nearing a hollow or trough in the mountains, now known as Nkantolo,[1] when he halted, raised his head and stared, like a pointer dog, towards the bush on one side. His sharp ears had caught the slight sound of a cracking stick, and at the same moment he detected a faint smell of burning wood. With every sense alert he cautiously parted the branches and leaves, took a few steps forward, and then, dropping on hands and knees, crawled upwind till he reached a large rock, behind which he took cover. He raised his head slowly till he could see over it, and found that he had almost run into the white men's encampment.

There, in a group round a small wood-fire, were

[1] A corruption of the Dutch word *kantoor* (office). Generally called " The Devil's Kantoor."

half a dozen of them, not ten yards from him, sitting with muskets across their knees, or close to their sides, drinking from cups and smoking large pipes. Further on between the trees he could dimly make out other groups. Outside the seated men were some standing on guard, while rows of horses, tied to ropes stretched from trunk to trunk, were crunching grain from little heaps on the ground.

He had never seen a horse before, nor a white man —not, that is, to remember—but, absolutely strange as the sight was, his trained eyes took in every detail as far as was possible in the flickering light of the fire. He noted several black men sitting apart or busy among the horses—not Matabele, but natives of some other tribe, wearing hats and coats like the whites. What fascinated him most was the nearest circle of great bearded Boers. There was one who had lost the thumb from his left hand and another with a black bandage over one eye. These, and other details of their personal appearance, he noted carefully. And then he saw the shrivelled figure of an old native squatting in front of them on the other side of the fire—one to whom the man who had lost a thumb seemed to be putting questions. He could not see his face, but his form outlined against the firelight seemed familiar. One of the Boers gave the burning logs a kick, and the flames leapt up—only for an instant, but long enough to enable Lobengula to see this figure more clearly. A glance was

sufficient. He had recognised him, and he ducked his head and wriggled back to the path.

A couple of hours later he was in Umnombata's hut telling his story. In short disconnected sentences he related his first sight of the strangers winding their way through the mountain passes and his discovery of them later at their encampment in the bush. He described the exact locality of this and gave minute particulars of all that he had observed—the Boers, their horses and the strange natives in white men's dress. Only one point did he omit. For some secret reason, which he would have found it hard to explain, he made no mention of the presence in the Boer camp of the evil genius of the Matopos—Ngwali the wizard.

Umnombata listened with rapt attention and without interrupting, except when Lobengula mentioned the Boer who had lost a thumb.

"That is Enteleka,"[1] he cried; "that is our old enemy!"

When the story was finished he rose to depart and bade Lobengula follow.

"You have done well, *Kosana*," he said, addressing him for the first time by a title of rank. "Now the hour has come for you to be seen by the King, your father, who for many years has believed you to be dead. Come with me."

Umnombata's *kraal* was some distance from the

[1] *Enteleka* was the native pronunciation of Hendrik, the name by which they knew Potgieter.

King's quarters at Mhlahlanhlela, but they could see the path clearly in the moonlight. There was a little delay in getting through the various stockades surrounding the *godhlo*, but the Chief Councillor had the *entrée* at all times and, once recognised by the guards, was admitted without protest. Contrary to his expectations the King had not retired, but was sitting on a chair by the waggon which always stood in the inner enclosure. In front of him burnt a bright fire, and over his shoulders was an ample *kaross* of monkey-skins, for the night was cool. The usual large calabash of beer stood at his feet. One of his *indunas*, Mbiko, commander of the newest regiment of young men, the 'Zwong-endaba,' was squatting on the ground close by, and several women and slaves were also in attendance. On arriving at the entrance Umnombata crouched low and gave the royal salute, while the young man behind him copied his example. Mziligazi was in rare good humour, and was laughing heartily at some joke he had made. He greeted the councillor warmly, and bade him draw close to the fire and take beer and snuff.

"What news bring you, and who is this great fellow with you? He is not one of my *matjaha* (young soldiers). I do not recognise him."

Instead of answering directly the councillor replied by a question.

"Does the old bull know all the calves that he has sired? May there not be some that he has forgotten?"

The King looked sharply at him, and then at his companion. He signed to the women and slaves to leave, but bade Mbiko remain.

"Tell me your business," he said. "The vulture does not stir at night unless he is disturbed."

Umnombata then launched into reminiscences of the past—of the early fights with the Boers at the Vaal river, of Enteleka and of the cattle that had been taken from him, and was proceeding, when the King grew impatient and asked why he was digging up old affairs.

"Because Enteleka has now followed us here, *Nkos*," replied the councillor, "and many Boers with him. This young man has seen them this very day and has run through the night to give us warning."

"And the young man, who is he?"

"King, it is your own son, the son of your wife Fulata, whose father was Malindela, the Swazi chief."

Mziligazi was visibly moved. He muttered, looked this way and that and took several pinches of snuff before he spoke again.

"Where has he been hiding all this time?"

"King, when you came back from the Great River your heart was black, and I feared you would have him killed. All these years therefore I have kept him in a secret place. But if I have done wrong kill him now, and kill me also, my father!"

Mziligazi turned to the other *induna*, who was still seated and was listening intently.

" Mbiko," he said, " this shall be your business. Call out your *impi* at once. This young man shall go with you, and guide you to the Boers. If he fails you will strangle him, but if he fights well and bloods his *assegai* I will take him back as my son. Be off at once, for Enteleka moves quickly, and thinks he will catch us asleep."

Chapter XI

THE NIGHT ADDER

Umnombata's guess was correct. The man with the maimed hand was the veteran Hendrik Potgieter, who for years had cherished the hope of paying off old scores against the Matabele, but had not, until now, been able to persuade any sufficient number of his countrymen to join him in an expedition to the unknown region beyond the Crocodile river. What had ultimately enabled him to carry out his design was a report, brought down to Potchefstroom by Bechuana hunters, who had it from Kalanga natives, secretly sent by Ngwali, that a Dutch woman was being kept as a prisoner by the Matabele, who were using her as a slave and cruelly ill-treating her. There was an outburst of passionate indignation. Over a hundred Boers at once formed themselves into a commando and swore to effect a rescue. By common consent they entreated Potgieter to lead them, and he was only too ready to do so. On the way to the north he induced a large number of Bechuanas to join the expedition under promise of allowing them a goodly share in the cattle and other loot. Most of them had firearms and some were mounted, so that it was with

quite a respectable force that he advanced towards the Matabele country.

He made his preparations with great care. Mindful of past reverses he persuaded the Boers to leave their waggons at the Shashi River, thus enabling them to cover the remaining hundred miles rapidly on horseback. By pre-arranged plan he was met and guided through the passes of the Matopo hills by Ngwali in person, who, while confirming the story of the white woman, concealed the fact that she was in his own custody, and assured Potgieter that she would be found at the King's *kraal*. His only object was to engineer an attack on Mziligazi, and if that succeeded he was prepared, at the proper moment, to produce Sara and to claim credit for saving her life. Potgieter did not entirely trust the wizard, and would have taken him on to Mhlahlanhlela, but he had no spare horses and the old man was apparently too feeble to keep up with him on foot, so he left him at the camp at Nkantolo, in charge of two Bechuanas, who had strict orders to keep him a close prisoner until the commando returned. He did not realise what a slippery customer he had to deal with.

In the small hours of the morning, by the light of the setting moon, the Boer force started on the final stage of their march, intending to halt when they came within striking distance and make a surprise dash on the King's *kraal* just before daybreak, when the Matabele would be still asleep. On leaving the

shelter of the hills, and reaching the open *veld*, they found the ground covered with a light mist, which effectively concealed their movements and, provided they could keep direction, was calculated to aid their plans. The Boers moved in extended order on either flank, keeping their Bechuana allies, upon whose steadiness Potgieter placed no great reliance, in the centre, and in this formation they were approaching the outskirts of the Matabele *kraal* when they unexpectedly ran into a number of cows and calves, grazing directly in the line of march. Potgieter, knowing well that natives never allow their cattle to wander by night, was at once suspicious, and galloped along the line to warn his men against interfering with them. But he was too late. The cows were an irresistible bait for the Bechuanas, who were already trying to round them up. The appearance in the misty half-light of a few herds, who made a show of driving the cattle back, only served to whet their appetite. Throwing caution to the wind they raced forward to cut them off, discharging their muskets and shouting. Wretched Gadarene swine! Before they could check their mad rush they found themselves between the horns of the Matabele army, which was standing there awaiting them. The Matabele opened their ranks to make a passage for the cattle and closed again on their pursuers like the jaws of a trap. Screaming their fierce war-cry, Mbiko's disciplined warriors fell with spears and clubs upon their luckless

victims. There was not a chance of escape, and in a few minutes the *veld* was strewn with their bleeding corpses. Lobengula was one of hundreds of young men who, that morning, blooded their *assegais*.

At the sound of the first shots Potgieter knew that all hope of a surprise was gone, and was convinced that Ngwali had betrayed him. He hastily rallied his Boers, those on the right wheeling round to the rear and joining the troop on the other flank, which had reached some high ground. Here the whole halted in doubt as to what next would happen—but not for long. Just as day broke they made out the wide crescent of the Matabele *impi* charging down on the confused mass of Bechuanas, and Potgieter, realising that the game was up, ordered a general retirement. Steadily and in good order the Boer horsemen fell back, turning at intervals to fire volleys to cover their retreat, though the Matabele were too engrossed in the business of butchery to try to follow well-mounted men. Long before noon the commando was back in the comparative safety of the Matopos. Arrived at the Nkantolo, where they had camped the night before, they sought in vain for the wizard, who, with his guards, had vanished. This roused a fear of further treachery, and while the main body rested for a few hours before resuming their march, a sharp look-out was kept and patrols were sent to the flanks and rear to guard against surprise.

While so engaged, the men of one party espied,

scrambling along a rocky *krantz* immediately above them, a number of natives whose movements seemed suspicious, and, without waiting to see whether they were friends or foes, they opened fire. Several were seen to drop, and the body of one of them started rolling down the steep crags, sliding and bumping until it finally came to a stop, not a hundred yards from where they stood. One of the Boers rode to the spot, and dismounting found the corpse of a wrinkled old man, bruised and disfigured beyond recognition. Obviously it was no Matabele, and, after turning the body over to make sure that no life was left in it, he returned and reassured his companions. Had he been able to identify the dead man, he might have taken a little more interest, but even so he would have been surprised to know that the chance shot had terminated the earthly career of him who, next to Mziligazi himself, was the most powerful individual in the whole of Matabeleland—had in fact sent the old wizard Ngwali to join the other ghosts which haunted the Matopos.

. . . . . .

It was many days before Lobengula had a chance to steal back to the mountains to see how it fared with Sara, and, when he did so, she was nowhere to be found. There were her huts, the hollow stone where he had left her pounding meal ; the calabashes and baskets which she had used for her daily needs, and even the castanets, which she had been wont to strap to her ankles when there was dancing in the

villages, but of the woman herself no trace. Nor was Ngwali anywhere to be seen. From the other natives he could extract nothing. In fact, they avoided him, and when he ran them to earth and questioned them, they professed ignorance or took refuge in evasive replies.

" Ngwali is perhaps talking with the Mlimo," they said, " and must not be disturbed : and as for Sara, we have not seen her lately—not since those white men passed through."

Lobengula formed his own conclusions. The excitement of his new life had thrust Sara into the background, and African natives are not at any time inclined to grieve overmuch for what is lost.

" She has gone away with the white men," he said to himself. " After all, they are her own people."

But he was wrong. As soon as he left her to seek Umnombata on that memorable day, Sara had begun to act on her own account. She had no doubt as to the purpose of the white men. It was herself they had come to fetch, and she must make her escape and remain in hiding until they were out of the way. The hills were an open book to her, and she knew of secret recesses where she could lie concealed till the danger was past. Her one thought was to fly from her own people, of whom she had an unaccountable dread.

Her preparations were soon made. A small calabash of cooked meal and a skin *kaross* were all she wanted. When the meal was finished she knew

she could exist for days on wild berries and edible roots, and of water there was abundance everywhere. The sun was low. So much the better ; it would be easier to hide. Lightly she ran down the slope and dived into one of the small *kloofs* where a native path followed the course of a stream, but had gone a few yards only when some sense of lurking danger prompted her to look back. She was just in time to see the head of a native bob down behind a bush. In the brief glance she thought she had recognised him —Mbikwa, one of Ngwali's satellites. Could he be spying on her ? She darted to one side, left the path and struck through the bushes towards a small bare patch of granite. And now there could be no mistake, for as she reached its edge she caught sight of another figure which immediately retreated. For an instant she paused, uncertain, then summoning all her strength she ran at full speed across the open and plunged into the dense scrub beyond. Heedless of scratches and bruised feet she tore along. Her *kaross* caught on a thorn-bush ; she could not stop to disentangle it, but left it there. She was going blindly now with no track to follow—merely keeping a general direction to the south, with an idea of working round till she could reach the caves at Bambata. She had no fear of losing her way, if she could only shake off those devilish spies. Now she was through the clump of bush on marshy ground strewn with large, flattish boulders, where she could jump from stone to stone, and make

better progress, but the light was failing and she could not afford time to step carefully.

And then the unexpected and dreadful thing happened. Leaping on to a ledge of rock, she felt a sharp, stabbing pain in her calf and, looking down, saw in the faint light a small object wriggling off among the moss. At once she realised what had happened. *Hlangwane!* (A night adder!) She had trodden on it and it had struck her. Sitting down, she pinched the flesh round the bite to squeeze the poison out. But she felt it was useless. If she had had a knife she could have scarified the wound. Had it been in her arm she could have sucked it. As it was she could do nothing. Hers was the plight of Eurydice; she could but wait—and die.

She had no terror—hardly despair; only extreme vexation, for now she knew she could not escape the wizards, and even as the venom began to steal through her system she caught sight of another of them, peering at her through a gap in the bushes. She made a last effort to stagger to her feet, but the deadly little adder had done its work. Her eyes began to glaze; she could only see dimly. A merciful drowsiness crept over her. It was very comfortable where she was. She would stay there, and not bother to move any more.

PART II

The Shadow Moves

Chapter XII

THE GREAT RIVER CROSSED

The old elephant-hunter pulled up his horse, dismounted and gazed into a deep pit at the foot of a small hill, a few miles north of the Umfuli river in Mashonaland. The sides of the pit were overgrown with brushwood, and its dimensions could not clearly be seen, but a heap of large pieces of rock, neatly piled up on the edge, showed him that it was not the work of Nature but was excavated by human hands. He turned and beckoned to another white man, who was toiling slowly towards him on foot, followed by a couple of natives.

"It's all right, Karl," he shouted, "I've found the place!"

The other broke at once into a run, and came up breathless. He was a short, solidly-built young man, whose square head, close-cropped fair hair, peaked cap and spectacles proclaimed him a Prussian. On his back was a knapsack, and he carried in one hand a small tool—half hammer, half pick. After a hasty glance at the hole in the ground, he knelt down by the heap of rocks, which he began eagerly to pull

about, smashing several of them with his hammer and closely examining the broken surfaces. The hunter seated himself on a fallen tree, lit a pipe and gravely watched him, while the two natives busied themselves with some bits of half-cooked meat which they were carrying, and apparently took no interest in the proceedings of their master. In a few minutes Karl looked up. His eyes were goggling out of his head and his cheeks were flushed. At first he spluttered with excitement and was incoherent, but gradually he broke into fair English, though with a strong guttural accent.

" Wonderful ! Wonderful ! We have a colossal discovery made. It is a quartz intrusion in the gneiss and schist. It is highly auriferous——"

" Not so many long words," broke in the hunter. " Is there any gold in it ? "

" Yes ! Yes, my friend, gold in abundance ! Look ! You can it clearly see," and, still kneeling, he held out several fragments of rock. He moistened a piece with his tongue and pointed out some yellow specks. " See, that is gold, and that, and in every piece gold is visible." His forefinger trembled with excitement.

His companion scrutinised the fragments one by one.

" Well, what's the next move ? " he asked at length.

" We must now bring our waggons and make a

camp. From here we shall prospect, and fill the waggons with specimens to show our friends in Cape Colony. Then we can raise money and come back with machinery to grind up the rock and extract the gold. We shall be rich men, I tell you, Mr. Hartley. In this hole alone there is a fortune, and you say that like this one there are many others."

"And how do you suppose we are going to get out of the country with a waggon-load of gold ore?" said Hartley. "Mziligazi gave us leave to shoot elephants. If he gets wind that we have been fossicking round for gold—well, I've seen his little ways, and they ain't pleasant. Already that damned nigger over there that the King sent with us is taking it all in, and will go back and blab to his master. So if you are going to try and cart bits of Mashonaland away in your waggon you and me will part company, Mr. Karl Mauch. I don't want to provide a meal for the crocodiles just yet."

The Prussian jumped to his feet, stamped on the ground and flung his arms about.

"Are we then to go away and leave the richest gold-field in the world because the country belongs to an old barbarian who is dying of gout? Can you not anything propose?"

"Now, keep cool," said Hartley, motioning to him to sit down. "The most we can do is to put a few of the best bits in our pockets, and if the boys get inquisitive, we must say we are going to use them

for *muti* (medicine). Then we'll go back and get the missionaries on our side; persuade them to talk nicely to the King and ask him to give us leave to dig for gold. If the old blackguard thinks he can make something out of us he may listen. Anyhow, that's our only chance while he's alive. But if he dies, then we must leg it out of the country pretty dam' quick, for these black devils of Matabele will get out of hand and will knock us on the head as soon as look at us. So we better sing 'God save the King' and trust to the missionaries."

But Mauch, in his ignorance, thought the hunter, for reasons of his own, was trying to scare him—so quickly does the sight of gold make men suspicious. He persisted that he must look round for more ancient workings and make a thorough investigation of what he already called the 'new gold-fields.'

"Have it your own way," said Hartley finally; "but I warn you not to let those niggers see what you're up to. I'm going after elephants, and shall work back to the King's *kraal* so as to get out before the rains, same as I've done these last four or five trips. If you take my tip, you'll do the same. Time enough to talk about the gold when we're safely out of the country."

So they went their ways, Hartley after ivory and Mauch after gold, and fortunate it was for the younger man that Mziligazi lay, as he said, grievously sick, for all his movements were watched and

noted by the native guide, who was really the King's spy.

. . . . . .

In the nineteen years since Potgieter's ill-starred raid, no white man had dared to challenge the Matabele by force of arms. Only a few venturesome missionaries, traders and hunters had reached the country, and these had been allowed by the King to stay solely for his own convenience—the missionaries because he found them useful as advisers and for doctoring sick men and cattle, and the others for the sake of the valuable presents—horses, waggons and guns—which he was able to extort from them. Their lives were full of peril and anxiety. They had to submit to depredations and insolence from the common people, and were conscious at all times of being subject to the caprice of the King himself, who might at at any moment trump up some grievance against them, rob them of their belongings and sentence them to expulsion—or even worse.

And now the old tyrant was failing. The gout, from which he had suffered for years, held him in a deathly grip. Impotent, and racked with pain, he became suspicious, fearing treason among his own people ; fearing his sons, lest they should try to seize the kingdom ; but most of all fearing an invasion of white men. After Karl Mauch had gone, and when it was too late to stop him, the King heard of his search for the yellow stone which they called gold, and, a little later, that expeditions were being

formed in the south to come up and dig in his country. A rumour reached him that Nkulumana was with them—Nkulumana, the son of his 'great wife,' and his lawful heir, whom, years before, he had sent to death. Men said that he had not died after all, but had escaped to Natal, and was now returning to kill his father and usurp the monarchy. In his rage and apprehension the old man sent for Hartley, but Hartley had foreseen trouble and had slipped away. Such other white men as dared to remain gave the royal town a wide berth. They were alive to their peril and, whether trading or hunting, kept together in parties, with their guns loaded, ready for emergencies. Only the missionaries remained calmly at their stations, unmoved by the rumours in the air, and so secure in their faith that they took no steps even to send their families out of the danger zone.

There came a day when one of these devoted men, Morgan Thomas, who had won confidence among the Matabele by his medical skill, received a summons from the aged Umnombata, now white-haired and wrinkled, but still alert and foremost in the council of the nation, to come and render aid to the ailing King, who was lying at Inyati, no great distance from the mission station. Although the duty was one of great delicacy, of danger even, he did not hesitate to obey the call, but packed a few drugs and started at once on horseback. On arriving at the *kraal* he was escorted to a large hut in the royal quarters,

outside which were squatted Umnombata himself and a number of lesser *indunas*, all wearing their usual mask of stoical indifference, exchanging snuff and gossiping in low voices, but waiting, as they had waited now for days—for what they hardly knew. From the Chief Councillor Thomas could at first extract nothing definite. "The Great One has need of you, Tomasi," was all he would commit himself to say. But after a while he rose and, drawing the missionary aside, became more communicative. "The King has a snake in his intestines. The *isanusi* (doctors) have failed to ease his pain, and only to-day two have been taken away and beaten to death with clubs. But you, Tomasi, have magic which is stronger than ours; you will cure him."

So saying, he pointed to the low door of the great hut, and Thomas, stooping down, crept in. At first he could see nothing, for the only light in the murky interior came from a small wood fire burning on a hearth moulded in the clay floor, but when his eyes became used to the gloom he made out the massive form of the King huddled up on a heap of blankets and skin rugs. The old savage was in a sitting posture, supported by two of his wives, who kept off the flies with ox-tail whisks, while a third held to his lips a calabash of beer. He was naked, except for some soiled cotton bandages which swathed his feet and knees. His hands were swollen and shapeless from the gout; his loose lip was pendulous and trembling, and his gross cheeks were

beaded with sweat from the pain which he was suffering. The light flickered on the shining bodies of several other women crouching in the shadows of the walls. The air was heavy with smoke and foul with the reek of human bodies and the nauseous odours of sickness. At first Thomas felt faint, and retched, but he sat down and by a strong effort recovered himself. The old man looked up when he entered and gave a dull glance of recognition, but for some minutes uttered no word. When at last he spoke, it was in choked and broken sentences, with frequent pauses for breath.

" Tomasi," he said, " I see you. . . . Look well at me. . . . An enemy has bewitched me. . . . You must make some English *muti*. . . . Bring back my strength, for I must lead my young soldiers against the white men. . . . They are coming in an army to dig for the yellow stones. . . . They want to rob me of my country. . . . Drive out my pain, Tomasi, and make me strong. . . . I will give you a waggon and twenty red oxen. . . . I ask you to help me against those who would rob me and those that have bewitched me."

Thomas saw at a glance that Mziligazi's course was nearly run. But he could at least relieve his suffering. With nervous fingers he unpacked from his case a bottle of colchicum and some other drugs. Calling for water, he mixed a dose, which he induced the King to swallow, following it a little later by a strong opiate. Then he sat down to wait for the

medicine to take effect. And as he watched he pondered. In his eyes this dying heathen possessed a soul; but to what was it doomed in the next world, on whose very brink it was hovering? A career stained with such monstrous crimes against humanity and the blood of so many countless victims could, according to the narrow missionary creed, meet with only one reward—an eternity in the burning fires of hell! The idea was too horrible. Had he ever had a chance? Was the Christian teaching, after all, better than the native belief that Mziligazi's spirit would go to consort with those others in the Matopo hills, there to be conciliated with votive offerings and to continue to guide the destinies of the nation? Thomas had striven for years to save the souls of these benighted savages, and could he honestly say that he had saved one? Were they then all damned? He shuddered, and wondered for a moment whether this missionary business was all wasted effort.

Every now and then the King half rose and mumbled abuse of Mauch, who had spread the reports of the gold; of white men in general, and of the witch-doctors, whose filthy decoctions had failed to cure him. Frequently he mentioned his sons—Nkulumana and Ubuhlelo. "They are dead!" he cried. "Umnombata saw to that many years ago. . . . Those that say Nkulumana lives are liars! . . . But Lobengula lives and does not come near me. . . . Where is he? . . . Hiding away as he did

before . . . afraid lest I should have him killed also. . . . Let him be brought that I may see him."

Gradually the strong drugs began to take effect, and he sank into an uneasy sleep. The women stole out one by one, all but the two who sat by the King and brushed away the flies. Then Thomas crept out also, longing to breathe the fresh air. In the dusk outside he found Umnombata and the others, still taking snuff and waiting.

Morning and evening for several days the missionary came and ministered to the King, whose life was slowing ebbing. One morning he found him semi-conscious, unable to raise himself or to speak, unable to swallow the draught which Thomas held to his lips. When he left, the *indunas* were still sitting in the courtyard, but when he returned, just before nightfall, they were no longer there. At the sound of his horse's hoofs several women peeped timidly from neighbouring doorways and, after a hasty look, withdrew. Two of the bodyguard, in capes and head-dresses of black ostrich plumes, stood as usual, like statues of ebony, before the entrance to the royal quarters, their hands resting on their long shields. They gazed at him in silence, but their looks seemed threatening and resentful. An air of mystery hung over the place, and, as Thomas stood hesitating, he saw a great grey owl, of the kind they call *huluhulu*, rise from the thatch of the King's hut. Slowly it circled outside the enclosure, passing so close to Thomas that he heard

the soft whisper of its wings and felt a cool breath of air as it rustled by.

He shivered, and, drawing his reins through his fingers, mounted his horse. He knew, without being told, that Mziligazi had at last crossed the Great River.

Chapter XIII

THE KING-MAKERS

The rank and file of the Matabele nation were not at once allowed to hear that anything unusual had happened. The royal wives knew, of course, and the King's personal slaves, but, apart from these, the secret of his death was known only to the inner circle of the councillors, who forbade any mention of it, under the direst penalties. Orders were still issued in the name of the King, and all who came to make reports or to bring disputes for settlement were told that the Great One was resting and must not be disturbed. A small party of white men, the first of the gold-seekers, were put off with excuses and ordered to await the King's pleasure. Although they had a shrewd notion of what had happened, they had no other course but to obey.

Meanwhile the chief councillors debated long and anxiously the grave question of a successor. They were suspicious of one another, but by common consent they turned to the oldest and wisest of their number, Umnombata, who had enjoyed the King's confidence and had been with him up to the last. He must surely have some message to give them—some

dying injunction as to who should rule the nation. What was this story about Nkulumana—that he had escaped death after all and had fled to Natal, where he had been working all these years for the white men ? Was it true that he was coming back to take his father's place ? If not, who was there ? What about Lobengula, whom no one had seen since Mziligazi had been stricken down with his last illness ?

Umnombata knew—no one better—what had become of Nkulumana, and he was well aware of the whereabouts of Lobengula, whom he had selected in his own heart for the succession ; but he was far too astute to commit himself until absolutely sure that he could carry the nation with him, and, as usual, he took refuge in evasions.

" The spirit of Mziligazi must guide us," he said. " When we have found a safe resting-place for his body, we must make offerings of fat cattle to him and his forefathers and ask for a sign. As for Nkulumana, how can I say where he is to-day, since I have not seen him these thirty years ? But let us send two *indunas* to Natal. They shall be our eyes and shall make search for him. And the rest of us will await their return before we choose our King. First let us find a fit place for Mziligazi, for otherwise his spirit will be restless and will bring trouble to us all."

" Yes ! Yes ! " the others shouted, relieved at the prospect of a solution. " Let us seek a place where Mziligazi can rest in peace."

According to Zulu custom, the corpse of the old King had been sewn up immediately after death in the newly-flayed hides of two black bulls, and still remained in his great hut, where for some weeks it was guarded by relays of women from the harem. But the time had now come for disposing of it. The news of his death was at last made public, and the witch-doctors were summoned to arrange for a state funeral. By their direction the body was removed to the long tented waggon which Mziligazi had used on his travels. Fires were kept burning all round it ; a number of old women were ordered to maintain a continuous howling, and war-drums were beaten during the night to scare away malignant spirits. Umnombata himself, with the chief witch-doctor and a few leading councillors, visited the priests of the Mlimo in the Matopo hills, and besought them to find a spot where the remains of so mighty a ruler could be laid to rest and where the people could come to make their offerings.

The priests were thoroughly alive to the gravity of the request and to their own opportunities for profit, and, after many gifts had been bestowed on them and many mystic rites performed, they announced that the god Mlimo had given a decision. With great secrecy they led the party to a cave called Ntumbane, hidden among the rocks and opening towards the north, on which side there was an open stretch of *veld*. Within this cave it was settled that the dead King should lie.

A few days later a procession moved early in the morning from Mhlahlanhlela. First came a party of 'dancing men,' yelling and capering, and the witch-doctors, arrayed in all the fantastic insignia of their office and shuffling along to the droning rhythm of a monotonous dirge. Next the waggon with the body of the King, drawn by sixteen black oxen, the royal team, and another on which were piled his private furniture and trappings, his *assegais*, his war-dress of ostrich plumes, his guns, the chair on which he had been wont to sit, the *kaross* in which he slept, his drinking-vessels and his long staff. Nothing was left behind. In front, in rear and alongside marched the grim warriors of the Nyama-ndhlovo regiment in full war-paint, and after them hundreds of women bearing on their heads great jars of beer. The tail of the procession was brought up by herds driving fifty jet-black oxen picked from the royal cattle *kraal*.

Within the cave the soldiers built up a throne of granite rocks, on which they propped the body of their King in a sitting posture. The waggons were taken to pieces, and placed, with his personal belongings, in a second cave, which was sealed up with boulders. When all was ready, the black oxen were driven up and, at a given signal, fifty young *matjaha* leapt out from the ranks with *assegais* poised. Each picked his beast and killed it by a single stab behind the shoulder. Huge fires were lit to roast the meat, and from each ox one joint was cut,

and placed, with the jars of beer, round the seated King.

For two days the army drank and gorged, performed the funeral dances, and chanted their battle-songs. On the third day they built up a wall of stones at the mouth of the cave, breast high, so that from where he sat the King could look forth across the land he won, and there, thirty years later, his skeleton was found, with the empty sockets of the eyes still turned northwards.

. . . . . .

Before the third day drew to its close the open space in front of the tomb was left once more in solitude. Broken calabashes and charred bones, the smouldering ashes of the great fires, the untidy remains of grass shelters hastily thrown up and now abandoned, were the only traces left of the funeral ceremonies. The soldiers, the women, the dancing-men and the witch-doctors, bloated and crapulous after their orgy of beef and beer, had taken their departure. The sound of their singing could be heard dying away in the distance and blending with the incessant shrill of the cicadas and the gurgles of the innumerable frogs which haunted the swamps.

There was no sign of human life until, from a narrow cleft between two of the gaunt rocks whose shadows were lengthening towards the east, about a dozen grotesque beings, some young, others wizened with age, all wearing greasy cloaks of skin and carrying bladders, dead snakes and other curious

symbols of their craft, crept furtively into the open in single file and squatted down by one of the dying fires in front of the cave. Conspicuous among them was Bonda, the head wizard, who had succeeded Ngwali, shot by the Boers twenty years earlier.

At the same moment Umnombata stepped out of the bushes on the opposite side, still carrying his long shield and *assegais* but bent with age and showing signs of fatigue. He was followed by Mjaan and Mhlaba, military captains, Tamjana, the chief witch-doctor, and several of the principal *indunas* of the nation, all of whom sat down at a little distance from the first party. The Makalanga wizards greeted them with respectful murmurs, and some of them busied themselves in blowing up the flames of the fire and feeding it with fresh logs.

" Where is he whom we seek ? " asked Umnombata.

Bonda stood up and flung off his skin cloak. He had a necklace of goats' knuckle-bones round his neck, and on his head an immense cap of jackal's hide, with the tails trailing down his back. His body was streaked and daubed with white ochre, and he wore an old scarlet tunic that had once belonged to an English officer of the line, but was now stained and shabby, with its gold lace faded and frayed. He put his hands to his mouth and sent up a cry, thrice repeated, like the call of a Kaffir crane. All looked towards the rocky path, and in a few minutes there appeared a man of about forty years of age, of

magnificent build, clad in a kilt of blue monkey-skins, which looked almost white against the dark bronze of his body, and holding a new rifle, but no shield or spears. After him waddled a very stout young woman with an open, jovial countenance, whose neck and waist were festooned with large blue beads, showing her to be of high rank. Standing there in the ruddy glow of the setting sun, Lobengula and his sister Ningi looked like giants beside the puny figures of the Makalanga wizards.

When he first heard from Umnombata, immediately after the death of his father, that he was the rightful heir to the kingdom, Lobengula had been thoroughly alarmed, and took refuge in flight. From his own village near Inyati, where he had led a tranquil life in the company of his three wives and his sister Ningi, spending his days in hunting and his nights in consuming huge quantities of meat and beer, he betook himself first to the house of Morgan Thomas. But he was an unwelcome guest, for the missionary feared that the partisans of Nkulumana would track him down and sooner or later kill him, and, not wishing to be mixed up in any affair of bloodshed, he induced Lobengula to go farther afield. Harassed by doubt, and suspicious of his own kinsmen, he fled to the Matopo hills, where he was received with open arms by the wizards, who saw that their own power might be strengthened if one whom they had befriended became King of the Matabele.

But Lobengula had no desire to reign. He shrank from the task of ruling a people from whom he had cut himself off since his troubled boyhood and with whom he had little in common. He knew that there would be bitter opposition ; that the whole of the Zwong-endaba regiment, with their veteran leader Mbiko, had sworn to have no other King but Nkulumana, who had been trained with them, and would never bend the knee to one whom they regarded as an alien. He saw trouble ahead also from the white men who had been pestering his father for leave to dig this cursed gold. His intelligence was far above the ordinary, and he foresaw that their numbers would swell, and that before long there must come a conflict between them and the savage horde surrounding them. The death of a white man would mean reprisals—probably in the shape of an army sent by the great British Queen, of whose might he had heard many impressive stories. But he was between two stools, for Umnombata had persuaded most of the *indunas* to regard him as the proper successor of Mziligazi, and if he now held back they would turn and rend him. He had jumped, therefore, at the suggestion that an appeal should be made to the spirit of Mziligazi, now happily installed in the company of the other ghosts which haunted these hills. His father had never shown any affection for him, and he had no doubt would name some other successor. It was a way out of his difficulty, and he came willingly, and brought Ningi too, who hated

and distrusted the wizards but had been urging him to accept the kingship. He wanted her to be present when the will of Mziligazi was revealed.

On this occasion the wizards did not waste much time in magical preliminaries. The spirits had been well fed that very day, and further sacrifices were not required. Bonda advanced to the mouth of the cave and made a speech in the Kalanga tongue, while the others chanted a monotonous song and kept up a continuous hammering on a drum. Every now and then two or three would break into a wild dance, flinging themselves into contortions and writhing with frenzied excitement. A mysterious powder was thrown on the fire, producing strange effects and turning the faces of the onlookers now green, now yellow. Before long the presence of the spirits was manifested. A rattling sound came from within the cave, like the sound of many voices all speaking together.

"Listen," cried one of the priests. "Mziligazi talks with his forefathers, Matshobane and Mankete."

"What do they say?" said Lobengula. "There are too many talking."

"Be patient," was the answer; "soon you will hear."

The priest heaped fuel on the fire, which leapt up and illuminated the mouth of the cave. Suddenly one voice sounded above the others.

"Approach, my son," it said, and all looked

towards Lobengula. Umnombata signed to him to move forward, and slowly, in a crouching attitude, he advanced to the cave and gazed fixedly at the opening. His knees shook slightly, and in the strong firelight drops of sweat were visible on the nape of his neck and his great bare shoulders.

"*What gift do you bring?*" said the voice.

He had nothing but his new gun, which he laid on the ground in front of the cave. As an afterthought, he untied his kilt of monkey-skins and placed it on the gun. Naked, except for the *ncwado* worn by all Matabele men, he leaned back, sitting on his heels, and waited.

The voice came again.

"*Now you have nothing left, but the country is yours, and the people. Take all and go in peace.*"

The voice ceased. The fire had died down. After waiting a few minutes, Lobengula turned and crawled back to the others. He rose to his feet and approached the group of *indunas*.

"It is my father's very voice," he said. "He must be obeyed. I give myself to you, and you shall do with me as you will."

Chapter XIV

THE DAY'S WORK

Lobengula reigned—but did not govern. He had been placed where he was by his sinister friends, the priests of the Mlimo, and they were resolved to keep him there as long as they could use him for their own crafty purposes—but no longer. They knew his strength and his weaknesses ; and it was his weaknesses that played into their hands.

He had not been brought up like other Matabele. Under Mziligazi's system the youths of the nation were brutalised from childhood ; taught to look on killing—with the accompaniments of torture and mutilation—as the summit of their ambition. By the time they reached manhood they had no desires left save lust, gluttony and the thirst for blood. Only by strangling all finer instincts could the military despotism of the first Matabele King have been maintained. But Lobengula had escaped all this. In childhood he had been forced into what was to all intents an exile from his tribe, and brought up under less violent influences—the mothering protection of the Boer girl, Sara, and the insidious tuition of the Matopo wizards, who were a class by themselves, the product of many generations of inherited wisdom

and cunning. His natural intelligence was above the common level, and instead of being arrested, as almost always happened with African natives before they attained manhood, it had been allowed to expand. It would be false to credit him with any feelings of humanity—as we understand the word—but he had at any rate not acquired the insane love of cruelty which saturated the minds of his own kinsmen, and he possessed traits which might, had the fates permitted, have developed into humanity, and which in later days, in spite of his surroundings, did prompt him occasionally to kindly actions towards Europeans. He lacked the military genius, the unswerving purpose and the callous disregard of physical suffering which enabled Mziligazi to consolidate his power. In default of these qualities he was obliged to employ methods of a subtler kind, but his suspicious nature led him into deeds more savage than any perpetrated by his father, and his efforts at diplomacy cost him in the end his kingdom and his life.

Apart from Umnombata, who did not long survive the achievement of making him King, there was no man in the whole nation whom he could call a friend. In his eyes everybody was a potential enemy, and it was this distrust which bound him hopelessly in the toils of the priests of the Mlimo. They had their agents among the Matabele themselves—the so-called ' witch-doctors '—clumsy imitators, it is true, but always at the King's elbow, and

therefore invaluable for the purpose. No man dare offend these sly foxes under pain of being ' smelt out ' for sorcery or conspiracy against the King himself. Did one of the King's cattle die, or one of the royal wives fall sick ? " There is sorcery at work," said the *isanusi*. " We will invoke our magic to trace it " ; and before long some innocent man or woman who had incurred their enmity was marked down as the culprit and was immediately sent to death. Sometimes the King himself would give them their cue. " That man Subule ; what does he want with so many cattle ? Soon he will have a *kraal* as big as the King's." It was enough. Subule was doomed for destruction, and at the next celebration of the first-fruits, when the Great Dance was held, and the witch-doctors had a free hand to smell out all who had been dabbling illicitly with sorcery, Subule would be taken away and clubbed to death—and not only he, but his wives, his children, his slaves, his very dogs and fowls, while his cattle would be apportioned between the King and those who had informed against him. A terrible system of blackmail, from which no one, from the highest to the lowest, was immune, and the irony of the grim business was that Lobengula, as King, was the Great High Priest of the nation, though actually the slave of the *isanusi*.

One person alone stood between the King and this devilish gang—not a man, however, but his own sister, Ningi, for whom he had a genuine affection.

To her he came for advice in all domestic matters ; consulted her when he thought of taking a fresh wife, or of bestowing some woman of the tribe in marriage. She was the friend, too, of the white traders, who owed many privileges to her good nature—leave to build a new store near the royal *kraal*, or to go into other parts of the country to buy ivory or feathers. For her intercession in these matters she was loaded with presents, and on this account, and because of the King's confidence in her, she excited the bitterest jealousy among the *isanusi*, who saw in her their most formidable rival. They were constantly on the look-out for a chance to catch her tripping and to compass her destruction, but it was long in coming.

Let us raise the curtain now and look at a scene in the King's daily life.

Behold him, on a morning in the year 1878, at his royal headquarters, Gibbexegu ('the noose of the old man')—the town afterwards aptly renamed Bulawayo ('the place of slaughter'). He is lounging on a rough Boer chair, with seat of raw-hide thongs, set under the shade of a spreading fig-tree in the goat *kraal*, his favourite place for dispensing justice, and he has just finished the daily routine of settling disputes, receiving petitions and hearing reports. Two or three white men—untidy-looking fellows with long beards—loll beside him, smoking and drinking *utshuala* (native beer) out of tin pannikins. Behind is a kneeling throng of women, slaves,

beer-girls and beef-girls, and in front, facing the King, is a half-circle of silent *indunas*, whose gravity contrasts strangely with the capering antics of a couple of Court jesters, leaping in the air, mimicking antelopes and yelling out extravagant compliments to the King.

It has been an unusually irritating morning. At the outset, Lobengula had to give audience to several white men. Really these white men were getting beyond endurance! First there had come that restless, bumptious young hunter, Selous, who was always wanting to be off in a new direction, with his elephant-guns and retinue of unruly Cape-boys. Wherever he went he created trouble, and one of these days he would get knocked on the head and then there would be the devil to pay. Lobengula disliked Selous, who always looked him straight in the face and seemed to have no fear of him. But to-day he had given him a sound rating, and had made him forfeit two oxen for killing a sea-cow (hippopotamus) on his last trip. Selous knew well that no one was allowed to kill these beasts, whose death always brought bad fortune. Well, he was off now to the Mashona country, and the King devoutly hoped that he had seen the last of him.

Just as Selous took leave, Ningi, the King's sister, wearing nothing but a blue Freemason's apron, rather soiled with use, came from behind, her face wreathed in jolly smiles. She knelt before the King and made some remark to him in a low tone. Her

brother's scowl at once disappeared; he nodded approval and signed to her to depart. Still kneeling, she worked her way out of his presence backwards, and went off in the direction of the women's quarters.

Next there had come two new white men—Government people, bringing a letter from Somtseu (Sir Theophilus Shepstone), the big chief in Natal. He had not understood the letter properly, and had told them to come back another day, but he distrusted anything coming from Natal. Was it not the country where rumour still said that Nkulumana was living? Lobengula had never been absolutely convinced that Nkulumana was dead, and how was he to be sure that these white men were not spies, who would later on return and bring back Nkulumana, with a large army to support him? It was an idea that always haunted him. They said that they only wanted to go and see the great waterfalls on the Zambesi, and they wished to take the son of Morgan Thomas, the missionary, with them as guide. But the King was suspicious of their real purpose, and had not made up his mind whether he would allow this. At any rate, he must discuss it first with his councillors.

After the white men had been disposed of, there had been the usual cases. But one in particular had incensed the King. A Holi slave had been caught that very morning in the act of drinking some of the royal beer from a jar placed on the ground by the girl

who was bringing it to the goat *kraal*. A monstrous crime ! One that must be dealt with firmly, or there was no knowing what these slaves would be doing next.

" Bring the dog here ! " said the King, in the soft, even voice which he always assumed when in a rage.

The miserable man—his mouth dribbling with terror, his eyes bulging from their sockets—was led in by two guards, who held him by the wrists.

" Your lips have tasted the King's beer ! "

The shrinking native could only gibber incoherently ; the bubbles of spittle on his mouth grew larger.

" Cut off his lips."

One of the soldiers approached him with a sharp knife, pulled his lips forward, and, with a single cut, sheared them off close to the teeth.

" Cut off his nose, which has smelt the King's beer."

The order was obeyed.

" Cover his eyes, which have seen the King's beer."

The skin of his forehead was peeled down with the knife till it hung like a curtain over his eyes. The poor wretch, his face one scarlet, spurting blotch, bellowed in his agony, and at each hideous mutilation the bystanders yelled with demoniacal glee. But a white trader who was watching went hastily outside the *kraal* and was violently sick.

" Take him away," said Lobengula, in the same even tone, and the dripping, bleeding thing was led off, to be hurled to the crocodiles in the River of White Stones.

The morning's work is over, but there is still a private matter to be attended to. Lobengula gives an order, and the crowd of onlookers—*indunas*, jesters, women, slaves—breaks up and disperses, leaving only Tjefu, the witch-doctor, who at a sign from the King comes a little closer. The King leans slightly forward and speaks in lowered tones.

" These white men from Somtseu : if I let them start for the Great River will they come back, Tjefu ? "

" Calf of a black cow," replies the other, " why should they come back ? If they return to Natal they may work mischief. Perhaps if they go to the river they may meet with an accident. Therefore my counsel is to let them go."

The King turns his eyes northwards, where the hill known as Mfazi-Miti stands up from the surrounding plain.

" So be it," he says after a little thought. " They shall go, and I will send with them two of my *matjaha*, to whom you must give strong medicine, so that they may come to no harm ; and give them also medicine to prevent the white men from returning. But I do not wish Tomasi's son to go. I will tell him to stay at home, for it is a dangerous journey for so young a lad."

And now he raises his massive frame, stands erect and stretches himself. There are pleasanter things to see to. News has just come that his chief wife, Losikeyi, daughter of the King of Gazaland, she for whom, a year ago, he had paid no less than sixty head of oxen—not the dwarf Mashona beasts, but long-horned Afrikanders—has been brought to bed of her first child. He has given his orders. Ningi, the capable, the mistress of his household, is personally to watch over the confinement. The *isanusi* have been told to get to work too—to prepare special medicine and sprinkle it on the birth hut, and see that the spirits are propitiated, to ensure a safe delivery. Meanwhile he will go himself and choose a fat ox to be used for a sacrifice.

He steps out towards the *kraal*, where some beasts are being kept for his inspection, but pauses and turns as he hears sounds coming from the enclosure behind him—wailing sounds as of women in distress. Some old crones are gathered round the gate of the wives' quarters, gesticulating and chattering with signs of perturbation. At the same moment two of the *isanusi* emerge and approach the King, with bent knees and cringing, servile movements.

" Some new trouble ! " mutters he. " Can anything be wrong with Losikeyi ? " Then aloud to the *isanusi* : " Has the child come ? "

" The child is there, great Stabber of Heaven," they cry together.

" Has she given me a son ? "

" There is a son," is the hesitating reply.

" What, then, is all this disturbance ? "

" Great One, there has been evil magic at work. Someone has bewitched the Great Wife. Thy son is still-born."

Lobengula's eyes flash with anger.

" Who has wrought this evil ? " he demands.

" *Dhlovukazi, udade wenu* (The she-elephant, thy sister.)"

The King's jaw drops. Ningi ! His sister, engaged in black magic at his expense ! It seems incredible.

" Have you proof ? " he asks.

For answer, one of the witch-doctors holds out a small oval locket, a cheap Brummagem thing. The King knows it well. It is one which he himself bought from a trader and gave to Ningi long ago.

" From the child's throat we drew forth this."

" And in Ningi's hut we have found this," adds the other, producing a dead toad, pierced with a wooden skewer. " Also we have cast the magic bones, and they say that she is the guilty one."

The evidence is incontrovertible. Speechless with indignation, the King stabs the ground in front of him with his staff, glaring, now at the witch-doctors, now at the men and women who have crept up and are standing with curious faces behind them.

Suddenly he jerks out a sharp order.

" Do not let me look on her face again. Let her be served as she has served my son."

" *Nkosi !* " answer the slimy couple, and both glide away with alacrity to their errand of death. Ningi will give them no further trouble.

Chapter XV

THE GREAT DANCE

The first excitement about the gold had died down. A few white men had the King's permission to work at Tati, and still remained there digging shafts and struggling with a battery which they had dragged laboriously up from the south, but Tati was a long way from the King's *kraal* and they did not give him much trouble. It was the diamond diggings at Kimberley that next disturbed his peace of mind. For one thing, his young men were always wanting to go and work there—to earn money wherewith to buy blankets and concertinas and shirts for themselves, and white men's gewgaws for their womenfolk. At first he would not let them go, for fear they would come back with new ideas and be useless for the army, but afterwards, when he found it difficult to stop them, he allowed a few to go on condition that they only stayed away for six months; and each man was pledged to bring back with him one good diamond as a present for the King. In this way he began to amass quite a hoard of pretty stones. He kept them in an empty biscuit tin which a trader had given him, and sometimes when he was in a good temper he would allow his wives to play with them and show them to the little ones.

Another nuisance about the diamond diggings was that there were so many restless white men there, and some of them began to find their way up to Matabeleland. In the old days there were only a few hunters and traders—and, of course, the missionaries. Now that this diamond business had started, Lobengula found that he was incessantly annoyed by men who wanted a bit of country to dig in, and wanted it written down on paper. The missionaries advised him to have nothing to do with them, and, above all, never to be induced to make a mark on paper. So he always refused. He would take their presents of guns, horses, waggons and trade stuff and sometimes give them leave to look for gold and diamonds, but never would he give them a paper. Boers too from the Transvaal were for ever hanging around. They professed to be his friends, and one came who called himself a 'consul' and wanted him to sign a treaty with the Government of the Transvaal for perpetual friendship. But he knew all about the Boers and refused their overtures. He remembered Potgieter, and was sure that if they once gained a foothold they would swarm over the country, shooting sea-cows and giraffes and grazing their cattle on the best pastures.

There were other white men—Portuguese—on the Zambesi and in the far Mashona country, but they never came near the King's *kraal*, and caused him, at first, no anxiety. The white men from the south, however, were his bugbear. He had serious thoughts

of giving a general order that all in the country should quit and that no more should be admitted—except, of course, missionaries, who never bothered him, and whose harmless tomfoolery of schools and church and singing hurt no one and was counterbalanced by their real usefulness in curing diseases, at which, he was fain to admit, they were far more skilful than the *isanusi*.

The missionaries could talk, too, and amuse him; tell him fairy-tales about their own country, and its great Queen, and her soldiers; the sea and the steamers; the land and its railways. A good deal of it was probably lies—not all, however, for one or two of his own people had been to Capetown and had brought back accounts of the wonderful inventions of the Englishmen there. It was very pleasant to listen to in any case, and he never grew tired of plying the missionaries with questions.

It was welcome news when he heard one day that the Great White Queen was actually sending one of her own *indunas* to Bulawayo to see him. Still more pleased was he to learn that the envoy was no other than the son of Moffat, the missionary, who had been his father's friend.

In due course John Moffat, with one white police orderly, arrived, and was taken into the presence of the King, whom he found in the goat *kraal*, surrounded by the usual crowd of *indunas*, women, slaves and hangers-on, including two or three white men, who were squatting on the ground beside him

drinking beer. It was not a favourable moment for a conversation on affairs of state, nor was the King in the mood for such business. It was the end of January, the time of the *Inxwala*—the Great Dance and festival of the first-fruits, when all the regiments of the army were gathered together at Bulawayo to be reviewed. Lobengula was absorbed in the ceremonies which custom imposed upon him and which helped to maintain him on his pinnacle of sovereignty. There was 'medicine' to be made for doctoring the army so that it should be victorious in battle. This, as High Priest of the nation, he must superintend personally. There was the yearly inquisition to be held, when the witch-doctors would smell out the King's enemies. There were decisions to be taken as to the expeditions to be sent out during the coming dry season ; cattle to be brought up for inspection, and some to be killed for feasts and sacrifices.

Moffat was told to wait until all this was over.

" You shall look at my fighting men," said Lobengula ; " then you can go back to your Queen and tell her what a great army I have."

So he waited, and in the next few days was a witness of the awe-inspiring spectacle of a review of the Matabele army and of the degrading orgy which followed it. The whole nation was assembled at Bulawayo, and round the *kraal* thousands of grass shelters were built to house them. From every village strings of girls were trooping in bearing on

their heads freshly brewed beer in calabashes and earthenware jars. Herds were driving up the King's cattle, which had been sent out for safe custody during the past year ; regiments of young men and regiments of older men were marching in, carrying their distinctive shields of ox-hide—red, and black and white, and speckled—one colour for each regiment. The dust and noise and turmoil were indescribable. The atmosphere was thick with the pungent smoke of innumerable fires of dried cattle-dung ; heavy with the smell of roasting meat. A babel of singing men, chattering women, bellowing oxen and yelping curs filled the air, and now and then one heard the report of a gun.

On the first morning Moffat accompanied the missionaries and traders to the open space beyond the royal cattle *kraal* and beheld a scene as impressive as it was unique. Twelve thousand Matabele warriors were slowly forming themselves into an enormous crescent, singing a war-song and marking the time with rhythmical stampings of their feet. Beyond them, through the dense clouds of dust, could be made out a mob of women and children, many with castanets bound to their ankles, dancing in perfect unison and adding their shrill voices to the men's. By the cattle *kraal* all was clear except for Mlugulu, the chief 'dance-doctor,' and his assistants, wearing the peculiar regalia of feathers, bladders and the pelts of wild animals which marked their calling.

As soon as the crescent formation was complete

the songs died down to a faint humming, above which could be heard the lowing of distant cattle. The dust gradually settled and exposed the ranks of the army in all their savage magnificence. They stood immobile, waiting.

There was a stir at the entrance of the *kraal*, and out rushed a number of Court buffoons, leaping into the air and shouting out fulsome compliments to the King : " Man-eater ! "—" Calf of the terrible ! "—" Black duck of Mziligazi ! "—" Piercer of the sky ! "—" King of kings ! " Then a string of the royal women, also attempting to jump and dance, but most of them so fat that they could only achieve an ungainly, lurching waddle, and finally Lobengula, an imposing, regal figure, in a kilt of monkey-skins, a splendid leopard robe round his massive shoulders and a tall blue crane's feather ascending from the wax ring on his head. In one hand he grasped a shield and in the other a javelin. The crowd of retainers parted right and left as he advanced majestically into the open. The moment he came into view of the army the Royal Salute burst forth in one booming roar—" *Bayete !* " A short pause, and then from the extreme left of the line a shrill whistle started, travelling along with increasing force until it became ear-splitting at the centre, and gradually dying away as it reached the right.

He halted on a slight rise in the ground and poised his *assegai* with deliberation, aiming towards the north-east ; held it thus a few seconds, and with a

sudden movement stabbed the earth in front of him. Instantly, with a scream of ecstasy, every man in the ranks of the army followed suit, turning about and driving his blade into the soil behind him. All knew that it was in that quarter that their next raid would be launched.

More ceremonial followed : a simultaneous rush towards the *kraal* by the whole line of soldiers with *assegais* aloft till they were within a few yards of the King and those standing by him. It seemed as if they must be overwhelmed. Then a sharp check and retirement. At a signal from the King several hundred head of cattle were released, and galloped madly across the plain pursued by fleet youths, who headed them off and drove them back to their *kraal*. More dances by the women, dances by the witch-doctors and a march past of the whole army, regiment by regiment, brought the long ritual to a close.

The next day was given up to the slaughtering of the bullocks provided by the King—a horrid business of frenzied men plunging their spears into beasts maddened by the smell and sight of blood. The cutting up and cooking of the meat ; the gorging, and swilling of beer ; the dancing and quarrelling, made up a pandemonium which seemed to Moffat like hell let loose.

The revels lasted a week, during which he had to contain himself in patience, for it would have been useless to attempt to see the King. When the hubbub abated, he sought a second interview,

taking one of the missionaries, Mr. Helm, with him as interpreter, and his own white orderly. He had a proposal to make—it was what he had been sent there for—and, as it was one of great delicacy, he was relieved to find that the King was alone and apparently in a good humour. He was lolling on the driver's seat of the old tented waggon in which he made his journeys and sometimes slept, and, on catching sight of Moffat, invited him to climb up and sit by him—a rare compliment. The missionary Helm was obliged to perch himself precariously on the *düssel-boom* below, while the orderly stood at a respectful distance.

" I am going on a journey," he began ; " but before I start I want to hear the words of your Queen, since she has sent you to give me a message."

" My Queen wishes to be your friend, and the friend of your people," replied Moffat, and with all the eloquence he could muster he went on to expand on the greatness and power of the British nation and the advantage of coming to an amicable understanding with their ruler. He suggested that Lobengula should put his mark to a paper pledging himself to perpetual peace, which he also would sign on behalf of the Queen, and that he should undertake to make no treaties with Boers or Portuguese or any other nations, but only with the British Sovereign.

But Lobengula was not in a hurry to commit himself to paper—the very thing he had been warned

against—and he had questions to put which it needed all Moffat's tact to answer satisfactorily.

"Tell me, Joni," he asked; "if this Queen of yours is so powerful, and has such good soldiers, how about Cetewayo, who was a Zulu like myself, and whose *impis* fought with spears, like mine—how was it that Cetewayo's army was able to kill so many of the English soldiers armed with guns at Isandhlwana?"

"The Zulus were in thousands that day, King, and the English were few. But afterwards the Queen sent more of her soldiers, for the English never give in, and Cetewayo was made prisoner and lost his kingdom."

"How can you say the English never give in? When a few Boers climbed up the Majuba mountain and destroyed the English army, did not they give back the Transvaal to the Boers? Why did not the Queen send more soldiers that time to wipe out the Boers?"

This was rather a poser, but Moffat did his best.

"The counsellors of the Queen thought that the Boers should be left in peace in their own country, and so she gave it back to them, for the English do not make war unjustly."

"They must be bad counsellors, for it seems to me that they did not think of leaving the Boers in peace till they found out they could bite."

With this Moffat, who had been an official of the Transvaal under British rule, and had lost his post

and suffered many indignities when it was handed over to the Boers, mentally agreed, but he thought it wise to say nothing.

" As for me," the King went on, " I want no Boers. They stole my father's country, and they would like to come here and steal mine. But they have not forgotten what happened to Enteleka (Potgieter). Now they want to make a treaty with me so that they can come here when they wish. I know the Boers. Except a few whom I allow to hunt, I do not want them in my country, and I do not wish to make friends with them."

" And the English ? " said Moffat.

" I know the English too. They deal fairly with my people, and have always been my friends. And I treat them well. Tell your Queen that I treat her people well."

There flashed across Moffat's mind the fate of the two British officers from Natal who had gone up country and met their death—without doubt by the King's orders—but again he felt it wiser to hold his tongue, for the conversation was taking a favourable course.

" But the Queen must not let too many of her people come. That I will not allow. I have been told the English are never content with their own country, but must needs go into other people's. Tell the Queen my words."

" Will you mark a paper so that the Queen may see your words ? "

" Let me see it," was the reply.

Moffat had been prepared for this. From his pocket he produced a ready-written document, and handed it to Lobengula, who turned it over in his hands and gravely scrutinised it.

" What does it say ? " he asked, giving it to Helm, who, having studied it beforehand, was able to give him an accurate translation in the Tebele language.

" Yes. Those are my words," said the King—and really thought they were.

Helm had also been careful to come provided with a pen and a bottle of ink. He showed the King where to make his mark, and a great cross was scrawled by clumsy hands at the proper place.

Just at that moment a trader (who happened by an odd chance to be a Transvaal Boer) strolled up to seek an audience on some private matter. He was asked to witness the royal sign manual, and did so without hesitation. Moffat's white orderly was called up, and also signed.

Never, surely, was a document of state completed under such bizarre conditions !

Chapter XVI

THE WHITE MAGICIAN

Sir Sidney Godolphin Alexander Shippard, K.C.M.G., D.C.L., etc., etc., was experiencing the greatest surprise of his life.

To think that he, who had been a judge of the Supreme Court of the Cape Colony, who had written learned treatises on jurisprudence, and was now Her Majesty's Commissioner for Bechuanaland, travelling, at the express invitation of King Lobengula, to Bulawayo, in his official spring waggon drawn by eight mules, with an escort of a captain, a sergeant-major, and sixteen smart troopers of the frontier police—to think that *he* should be held up by a couple of hundred raw, malodorous savages, clad in nothing but feathers and loin-cloths, brandishing clubs and spears and screaming bad language at him—he judged it to be bad language, though he didn't understand a word—well, it would have been ludicrous if it had not been so utterly incomprehensible.

His outward appearance was not, it is true, quite as imposing as his high-sounding name, and the string of letters after it, might have led one to expect. Considerably below the average height, he was

inclined to rotundity in the region of the waist; rude people might, in fact, have called him pot-bellied. The baldness of his head was compensated for by an exuberant growth of whiskers, trimmed like those of a French admiral, in the style once called 'Dundreary.' On this occasion he had been caught unawares, and had had no time to dress himself in the immaculate fashion which he generally affected. It was early in the morning, and over his pink suit of pyjamas he had hastily thrown a vivid bath-wrap of blue and yellow towelling, He had clapped a dome-like pith helmet, of a kind now extinct, upon his head. In spite of this droll combination—droll, that is, to European eyes, for natives have not our sense of the incongruous—he was not without a certain dignity of demeanour. However intense his disgust at the insolent intrusion of these savages, he never for an instant lost his self-possession. At the first sign of trouble the escort had closed round the waggon, but Shippard said a word to their officer, who gave the order to his men to extend a few paces, dismount and stand to their horses. A camp chair was brought from the waggon and placed in its shade. One of the troopers, who spoke Zulu, was called from the ranks to interpret, the Commissioner seated himself with deliberation, calmly faced the noisy and threatening mob of natives, and asked who was their leader.

An elderly, undersized man, whose head-ring showed him to be a person of standing, though his

only garment was a mangy *kaross*, forced his way to the front and announced that he was the chief of the district and that his name was Ndwela.

" Tell your people to give us more room," said Shippard, " that you and I may talk ; I also am a chief, and do not speak with the lower orders."

The *induna* was visibly impressed. He shouted some command, which every single man in the crowd repeated, and, with a good deal of jostling and a buzz of chattering, an open space was gradually cleared. While this was going on, Shippard trimmed his finger-nails with a pen-knife and assumed indifference. His confidence had its effect. The babel of voices died away and the natives settled down on their hams and prepared for one of those long *indabas* they so dearly loved.

" Now," said Shippard, turning to the interpreter, " ask him what is the meaning of all this nonsense."

The elderly *induna* began a vehement tirade, which was translated sentence by sentence.

" We are the people of the mighty one, Lobengula, and guard his borders. And we know who you are. You are an evil magician. We know that behind you there are many of these white soldiers, marching up with horses and guns to attack the Matabele country."

At the word ' magician ' Shippard looked surprised, and asked the interpreter if that was really what the old man had said.

" Yes, sir, he said *umtagati*, which means sorcerer, or wizard, or something of that sort."

The natives in rear caught the word, and loudly repeated it.

" *Yebo ! Yebo !* " they shouted excitedly. " *Umtagati !* "

Shippard raised his hand for silence.

" Tell them who I am. I am no magician, but the *induna* of the Great White Queen. I have been visiting Khama, the King of the Mangwato, who is her friend, and have been invited by your King to come and see him also. If you try and stop me you will be answerable to Lobengula."

" *Atji ! Atji !* (No ! No !)" cried all when they heard the denial. " If you come to visit our King in a friendly way, as you pretend, why do you bring these soldiers with you ? You must be a magician ; else why do you travel by night, like wolves and ghosts ? "

" And you have been seen doing your devil's work," added the *induna* ; " but I have sent to tell the King what you really are and I shall not let you go on."

It was not until long afterwards that Shippard discovered that a native, who had asked for a job on the road a few days before, and had been taken on to help with the cooking, was a Matabele, sent by Lobengula's orders to spy on him ; that this man had crawled up one night and peeped under the tent in which the Commissioner slept and had noted and reported his sinister conduct.

" The white *induna* took off all his clothes and sat

in a pool of boiling water. He rubbed his naked body all over with terrible white frothy *muti*, and squeezed the boiling water on his body with some strange vegetable. Without doubt he is a powerful wizard."

This disturbing news had been transmitted at once to Lobengula and caused him some apprehension. He had daubed himself with paint and busied himself with charms and divinations to counteract the spells and to discover the real purpose of the insidious white man who said he came from the great Queen.

But at the time all this was unknown to Shippard. He could merely deny the accusation and repeat that he was on an errand of peace. After a long wrangle he obtained permission to send a letter to the King, and was allowed to stay where he was till a reply was received.

For four days he and his party were obliged to wait surrounded by hostile natives, whose numbers were constantly increased by new arrivals, all fully armed. The villagers were quiet, and seemed anxious to barter their produce, but the soldiers spent the time drinking *utshuala*, dancing their war dances, and occasionally rushing in a threatening way up to the fence of bushes that the Englishmen had thrown round their camp. Once, indeed, some of them, excited with drink, leapt over this scanty barrier, flourished their *assegais* within a few feet of the escort, went through the action of stabbing, and screamed insults and foul abuse. They wanted to

provoke retaliation, which would have given them an excuse for falling on the whole party and killing them on the spot. In this they failed completely, for the troopers saw their purpose, and stood with folded arms regarding them with contemptuous indifference.

On the morning of the fifth day a great change was observed. While Shippard was at breakfast old Ndwela reappeared, and approached the camp with obsequious servility. In a cleft stick he carried a letter, the purport of which had evidently become known to him. It was from Moffat, who had reassured the King as to Shippard's intentions. The whole party was to proceed without molestation and present themselves forthwith at the royal *kraal*. Two of the principal *indunas*, Mjaan and Lotje, had come with the letter to see that the King's word was obeyed. The commander of the unruly soldiers at once ordered his men to make a clear way for the white chief, beating them back with his stick when they appeared slow to move.

The journey was resumed, but even now it was not all plane sailing. At each village passed there was opposition. The fame of the white magician and the suspicious presence of the soldiers had spread far and wide, and long explanations had to be made by the two *indunas* before they were allowed to go on. While they were on the move, bodies of fighting men kept pace with them on either side of the track, and when they were halted they were exposed to jeers

from the women and children, who swarmed round their camps, though they were not above begging for presents, and were always on the look-out for opportunities to pilfer.

It was a *via dolorosa* for Shippard and his party, and great was their relief when at last they descried in the distance a mass of what looked like gigantic beehives, and were told they had arrived at the royal *kraal* of Bulawayo.

Chapter XVII

ULODZI

All this time Lobengula had been enduring qualms of doubt and anxiety. He was far too shrewd to believe every one of the fantastic tales about Shippard and his movements that were brought to him by credulous busybodies ; yet the reports of his own spy had aroused in him misgivings, and he could not quite rid himself of the idea that some evil magic was in the air. There were the white troops too. Could they be the forerunners of a great army, as was said ? Moffat had assured him that they were the customary escort of a big English chief, and that their presence showed what an important personage was approaching. But there were other white men at the *kraal* who had reasons of their own for wishing to keep the Queen's officers out of the country—Boers, and persons who were working in German interests—and who had thrown out hints and dark warnings which had made the King uneasy. Could Moffat be trusted ? Might not he also be mixed up in some plot ?

Daily it was becoming more difficult to keep his own excited soldiers in hand. Regiment after regiment came to Bulawayo and besought him to

turn the intruders out. Some went so far as to clamour for a general massacre of the handful of whites in the country—the traders and hunters, and especially those who sought concessions for land or gold-mines.

"It would be a trifling affair for us, O Great One. Let us kill these and frighten the others away. If they are not killed, thousands more will come in and eat up our land like locusts."

And so on, day after day, until the King at last lost his temper.

"These few white men here are my friends," he exclaimed; "but if you really want to fight with white men I will send you to Kimberley, where there are plenty. Try to fight them there and see what they will do to you."

For all that, he did not relax his precautions against sorcery, and spent the nights with his witch-doctors, brewing hell-broth and fortifying himself by mysterious rites to ward off possible danger. Whether he believed in them or not, it was imperative that he should comply with custom to conciliate those who did.

What raised Lobengula above his people—differentiated him, in fact, from all but two or three individuals in the whole of Africa—was his habit of looking ahead and under the surface. In all probability this was the outcome of his early intimacy with the Dutch girl, Sara, and had been fostered by his association with the Makalanga priests in the Matopo

hills. To a man of his intelligence—superior to that of the vast majority of African natives, though only half developed when measured by our standards—this faculty acted as a curse. It gave him a sense of responsibility ; made him anxious about the future ; fearful of men's motives. Instead of being governed by blind impulses, like those around him, he reasoned things out, and, as his reasoning was often tainted with superstition, he lived in a realm of doubt and hesitation.

Physically a brave man, he was morally a coward. For the whites around him he had no great respect. Apart from the missionaries, they all wanted something from him—gold concessions or land or other favours, sometimes women—and they worried him out of his life. He had far stronger cause for disliking them than the people of his tribe had, for he could see—or thought he could see—forces behind them which the others could not. Had he yielded to the natural instinct of a savage, he would have given the word for a general slaughter, and, knowing that he held Shippard and his party in the hollow of his hand, would have ordered their destruction. But he dreaded the consequences, which were beyond the vision of the ordinary Matabele.

No. He must meet Shippard face to face, and perhaps he might be able to turn his visit to account and use it as a means of escaping from the network of troubles which encumbered him.

. . . . . .

" The Great One, our master, awaits you, White Chief."

The summons was brought by the two *indunas*, Mjaan and Lotje, and Shippard made haste to obey.

During the three days since his arrival, he had been the unwilling focus of embarrassing attention from a constant crowd of unclean, importunate natives of both sexes and all ages, who flocked to his camp, and pestered him and the members of his escort for presents. He was sick of their everlasting cry of " *Tusa ! Tusa !* "—the demand for backsheesh which seemed their one thought. Now at last the moment for action had come.

It had been arranged that the missionary, Mr. Helm, should attend at his first meeting with the King to act as interpreter, and Moffat and Major Goold-Adams, the officer commanding the escort, were also invited to be present. Shippard had a chair brought, so as to save himself from the indignity of squatting on the ground, as other white men did, and, preceded by a mob of soldiers and loafers of both sexes, he started on foot under a blazing sun for the royal quarters.

On this occasion the ' Queen's *induna* ' had time to dress the part. He had given some thought to this matter, and had decided that his personal comfort was a secondary consideration in comparison with the need for an impressive entrance. Accordingly, although it was the hottest season of the year, he donned a tightly buttoned black frock-coat, on

the breast of which he pinned the star of his order, a pair of grey kid gloves and patent-leather boots. In one hand he carried a Malacca cane with a large silver knob. The white dome-like helmet gave an accent to the point-device scheme of his attire, and if he could have added a cubit to his stature his appearance would have been almost pontifical.

At the outer gate of the palisade the crowd was ordered back, and Shippard and his three companions were escorted, through a throng of women clustering round the huts of the 'queens,' to the inner enclosure, which was empty, except for a full-tented waggon standing under the shade of a solitary fig-tree and an old-armchair close to it. Lying about were newly flayed hides and the skulls of several bullocks, which gave out an overpowering stench and were the centre of attraction for myriads of buzzing flies ; but Shippard stifled his feelings and took his seat on his own chair, while the other three stood behind him and the two *indunas* squatted in front.

For some minutes they waited in the glare of the sun, and wiped the sweat from their necks and foreheads. A subdued hum of conversation from outside the fence told them that they were being peeped at by inquisitive women through the chinks, and Shippard had the idea that he was being scrutinised by somebody from behind the dirty canvas curtains which hung before the tent of the waggon. Presently these were drawn apart, disclosing the

King in all his majesty standing against the dark background of the tent.

What would not one give for a permanent record of the strange meeting! But none has been preserved, for, although Goold-Adams had a camera, he had been cautioned that any attempt to use it would have re-awakened the suspicion of sorcery.

Shippard had come prepared for a surprise, but, even so, he was taken aback at first sight of the herculean frame of the savage monarch, whose nakedness—for he wore nothing but the monkey-skin sporran and a strip of blue calico round his waist—seemed to accentuate his proportions.

Lobengula was equally astonished when he saw approaching him the dapper little gentleman in the frock-coat and helmet. Could this be the great magician about whom he had been warned—the formidable *induna* of the great Queen, whose coming had caused so much stir? No wonder the Queen had sent soldiers to take care of him. But, whatever his feelings were, he did not allow his countenance to betray them, and, descending from the waggon, he accepted the hand which Shippard extended in greeting, and, sinking into the arm-chair, signed to the white men to be seated. As only one chair had been brought, this meant that they would have to squat on the ground; Helm and Moffat, in fact, did so, but Goold-Adams remained standing.

Some time was passed in the formal exchange of compliments. Neither of the principals was at

ease, and Shippard began to fear that his visit would end in nothing. He determined to force the pace, and was relieved when Lobengula lit up a large wooden pipe, thus enabling him to produce one of his own cigars, and partially to counteract the nauseating odour of the hides and skulls.

" King," he began, " I want to talk to you about the boundary between your country and Khama's. Can we not settle the dispute, you and I ? I have heard what Khama has to say, and shall send his words to my Queen ; but before she takes Khama's side she will want to hear yours."

To this the King made no reply, Instead, he shouted for a slave and bade him bring beer. Several girls at once appeared bearing large calabashes, and set them down, waiting for his orders. Shippard and his friends were invited to partake of the beer, which they found acid, refreshing and not unpleasant.

Suddenly Lobengula looked round and saw that a number of women, with a few *indunas* and other inquisitive outsiders, had edged their way in and were thronging the entrance to the enclosure.

" Be off with you ! " he cried, and, turning to Helm, who was interpreting, " I want to talk to your *induna* alone. Bid him send the others away, that he and I may say what is in our hearts."

The natives at the gate slunk out of sight ; but the old councillor, Lotje, at a sign from the King remained. The other white men withdrew, leaving

only Helm. The four were left alone, and the King asked Shippard and Helm to draw closer.

"What is it you really want from me?" he said in a low voice. "Every white man who comes wants something."

"I want nothing," said Shippard, "except to bring you a message of good-will from my Queen and to hear what you have to say about the boundary."

"Let the boundary wait," replied the King. "There is something else to talk about—these white men at my *kraal*. For a long time they left me alone, but ever since I marked that paper for Joni (Moffat) they have been worrying me. There are many here now, and every month more come, and every day one or another begs some favour. Some want women, others land, and others, again, want places to dig for gold; and they are the worst. They all tell me they come from your Queen, and yet they are not friends among themselves. How am I to know whether they are telling me lies or not?"

"Tell me who they are that say they come from the Queen," said Shippard.

The King went on without taking any notice.

"A few weeks ago three came who say they are sent by one called Rhodes"—he pronounced it Ulodzi—"and they say he will give me guns and a steamer and plenty of money if I will let him dig anywhere in my country and keep all others away. They say that Ulodzi is a big councillor in Kimberley,

and that he has bought all the diamond-mines, and now he must have all the gold-mines. Tell me the truth, White Chief. Who is this Ulodzi? If I give this thing to him, will it keep the others away? They sit round me with their tongues hanging out like jackals waiting for the lion to leave a carcase. My young men are impatient at so many coming. But this man Ulodzi, is he one that I can trust? Why does he not come to see me himself? Do you know Ulodzi?"

"Yes, King," replied Shippard; "I do know him, and I will tell you all about him."

Chapter XVIII

THE CONCESSION

The Rev. Charles Helm, of the London Missionary Society, shook his head with a smile.

"No, no, my friend, I never drink wine."

"Well, there's ginger-beer," said Thompson, who was babbling with excitement, "and if you won't join us in a bottle of fizz you must drink the toast in that. You absolutely must drink success to Rhodes and the concession. Man alive! This is the biggest thing that's happened in South Africa since old Van Riebeek landed at the Cape!"

"A big thing it is indeed," echoed Rudd; "it means a great new colony for Englishmen. It means that Rhodes has euchred the Germans and the Portuguese and the Boers and all the blessed crowd of them."

"Yes," added Maguire, the third of those standing in front of Helm; "you'll see some changes here as soon as Rhodes gets to work. You've done a good day's work for Rhodes, padre, and he won't forget it; a good day's work for your mission too."

Helm was sitting at a camp table in the square hut where the three others had their meals. Before him lay a large sheet of legal-looking paper covered with writing. He himself had just added the following words :

'*I certify that this document has been fully interpreted and explained by me to the Chief Lobengula and his full council of indunas, and that all the constitutional usages of the Matabele nation had been complied with prior to his executing the same.*

'*Charles D. Helm.*'

He laid down his pen and, rising, took the enamelled mug which Thompson held out to him.

" God grant that you may be right ! " he said solemnly. " God grant that Rhodes may succeed where we have failed, and may bring the blessings of civilisation to this benighted land."

A prayer or a toast—it was all the same thing.

" Success to Rhodes ! " the others cried as each tossed off his mug of champagne. Helm sipped his ginger-beer thoughtfully and shook the hands they held out to him.

Let us take a look at the three as they stand there together—for the last time, as it happens, for Rudd is just starting down-country.

He is Rhodes's partner in many ventures ; a

mining magnate and speculator from Kimberley. Tall, bearded and with a somewhat melancholy expression, he carries determination in every line of his features. There is a feline repose about him; he is always ready to spring.

Rochfort Maguire is also a close friend of Rhodes, their acquaintance dating from Oxford days. His cultivated, self-contained manner and slightly drawling voice give no clue to the hidden fire of his Irish temperament—to his thirst for action and adventure, mingled with a certain pugnacity.

Thompson, the third, is a blunt, square-built colonial, who has spent his life handling natives, and has so deep a knowledge of them that he can read their very thoughts.

Three men of different calibre and experience, yet all united by the common bond of allegiance to Cecil Rhodes. And Rhodes must have known what he was about when he chose them, for they succeeded where many others failed.

After long days of palaver with the King and his councillors, of patient explanations, of irritating delays, in the teeth of bitter opposition from rivals, they had concluded a treaty under which the whole of the minerals in Lobengula's vast dominions passed into the charge of Rhodes.

The crucial point had been reached the day before, when the King was haggling about terms. A thousand breech-loading rifles, a hundred thousand rounds of ball ammunition and a steamboat

with guns for the Zambesi were demanded and agreed to.

Then the King came to money.

" How do I know you have any money ? " said he.

Rudd rose with a smile and drew a bag from his breast pocket. He cut the string and emptied the contents into a wooden meat platter which he picked up from the ground. Golden sovereigns ! A hundred of them—perhaps more. They slid out of the bag with an attractive jingle and lay in a shining heap on the platter which he handed to the King.

" There," he said ; " when you put your mark on my paper those will be yours, and the same number will be handed to you every month."

The councillors sitting round gaped with astonishment, and one or two half rose to catch a glimpse. Not one of them had ever seen so much money at once. To Lobengula this golden bait was a tempting one. Not a muscle of his face betrayed him, but he could not resist handling the coins and letting them run through his fingers.

" What matters this gold in the Mashona country," he thought, " which has to be searched for and dug out of the rocks ? Why should there be such a to-do about it ? It may not be there at all. At any rate, my people will never seek it. Here is the real thing—gold to buy waggons and horses and cattle—money to be had for the asking."

For some minutes he fingered the coins, then,

recovering himself, he pushed the platter towards Rudd and watched him pour them back into the bag.

" Go now, and come back to-morrow," he said. " I must talk it over once more with my *indunas*."

Far into the afternoon the white men's offer was discussed. Some of the councillors were tempted by the rifles, which would put them on a level with the Boers. Others were afraid there were too many white men in the country already. They did not want any more scratching about and digging holes in the ground. Each in turn had his say, till only Lotje was left. He had not spoken nor showed much interest, but pretended to be busy hunting for lice in the blanket hanging from his shoulders.

" What say you, Lotje ? " said the King.

The old man rose at once to his knees and looked round. Snapping his fingers and bending his body forward at each sentence, to give emphasis to his words, he made an impassioned and eloquent address.

" My father ! You are surrounded by people who want to devour you and have your country. There are the Portuguese on the Zambesi ; there are Kruger and his Boers in the south." He pointed in each direction with his forefinger. " They are creeping nearer every day. Here, in Bulawayo, are all these ravenous wolves who clamour for land and the right to dig for gold, and who give you no peace. Never will you be free from this plague unless you

make terms with one who is strong enough to keep away all the rest. Now there are the three who come from Ulodzi. They hold aloof from all the others and are different from them. They do not drink brandy or quarrel; they do not desire our women, but spend their time writing on paper and reading books like the missionaries. But I have talked with them, *Nkosi*, and know what is in their hearts. They seem to me to be the only ones who can do what they promise. I have heard also many things about Ulodzi, who sent them. Men say he is the friend of the Great White Queen, and that he has a great treasure in money, and other men come to him for orders. They say that Kruger fears him.

"If he wants to bring people to dig for gold in the Mashona country, how can that hurt us? Those who work at Tati, have they ever harmed us? We do not dig the gold ourselves, and if we let the white men find the gold there will be more money for us. My counsel, therefore, is to give these three what they ask. But allow no digging till they have brought the guns and cartridges, and you have their gold money in your hands. Yes, King, that is my counsel."

Lotje's words carried the day, and the others murmured assent. Lobengula was visibly relieved as he dismissed the council, ordering all to assemble next day to hear him talk to the white men.

And next day all went quickly and smoothly.

Once more Helm read the paper, translating it sentence by sentence, and when he had finished the King put the question :

" Do you agree, *indunas* ? "

" We agree," they all shouted. There were no waverers. Helm showed the King where to make his mark and wrote his name above it. The bag of sovereigns was produced and placed in his hands. Beer was brought, and plates of steaming beef. There was a general air of jollification, and not the slightest shadow of trouble to come.

But there were dangerous elements among the traders and speculators who frequented the King's *kraal*. They had been waiting, in some cases for months, in the hope of winning the royal favour and getting concessions of land or gold reefs for themselves, and the success of Rhodes's party, so far from dashing their hopes, only goaded them to fresh efforts. Each had his own axe to grind, and mistrusted the others, but they now began to work towards the same end, for all were determined to wreck the new concession.

The departure of Rudd, who was in a hurry to get away with his precious document, and a few weeks later of Maguire, who, now that the main object had been attained, soon grew tired of the deadly boredom of life in a savage *kraal*, left Thompson alone to hold the fort. The situation called for a man with unusual tact and diplomacy. Thompson was a plain, straightforward man, with

no qualifications except his mastery of the native language, and he was no match for the schemers around him.

The first mischief was wrought by two Boers, who went among the *indunas* and told them that Rudd had lied to the King; that Rhodes was an impostor—a mere nobody who had no real power.

"But Ulodzi is a councillor of the Great White Queen," said Mjaan, one of those who had been present at all the discussions.

The Boers laughed, and looked knowingly at one another.

"How do you know there is a Queen? None of you has ever seen her."

The suggestion spread like wildfire, and lost nothing in the telling.

"Perhaps Moffat and Helm and Rudd have all lied to us. Perhaps there is no Great White Queen after all."

They went to Lobengula with the story. He had no misgivings about the matter; still, the question must be cleared up and all doubt removed, and, besides, he would like to find out something on his own account about England and the Queen with whom he had made a treaty of friendship.

"I will send some of you to her country to find out about her," he said. "I will send you, Babyaan, and you, Mshete. You shall be my eyes, and shall come back and tell us what you see."

Of all the white men at his *kraal* there was only

one he trusted, and to this one he confided his plan, and asked him to conduct a mission to ascertain the truth. The mission started, but the campaign of intrigue and misrepresentation went on.

Almost daily some one or other of Rhodes's opponents sought audience with Lobengula to poison his mind. They grew bolder in invention as they noted the effect.

" What have you done, King ? " said one who was the agent of a German speculator. " You have sold your whole country. It is not the gold that Rhodes wants ; it is your land."

" Rhodes will bring up thousands of white men," said another, " who will fill up every corner. Soon you and your people will not have enough room to stand in."

" They will rob you of your cattle and your women," said a third. " Then they will kill you and make slaves of your young men."

Constant dripping wears away a stone, and when all told the same story Lobengula grew seriously alarmed. He sent for Lotje, who tried to reassure him, but Lotje had always sided with Rhodes's party and was in daily intercourse with Thompson. Was he also in the plot to rob him of his country ? The King's agitation increased. The witch-doctors were consulted. They were quick to sense the direction of his suspicions.

" Lotje is engaged in working magic," they told him. " He is your enemy."

Soldiers were sent. They found the old *induna* with a new gun—proof positive that he had illicit traffic with the whites. It was enough. He was led into the courtyard and strangled. They killed his wives, his children, his slaves, and even his dogs and fowls, so that no trace of him or his evil influence should survive.

The news reached Thompson, who years before had seen his own father murdered by natives in Cape Colony. He made up his mind that he would be the next victim, and, jumping on a horse, galloped away from the *kraal* and hardly paused until he had reached the mining-camp at Tati, a hundred miles south.

And then, when all this trouble was at its height, there came one who knew no fear and who at once set to work to save the situation—Dr. Jameson, who once before, when the King was suffering from gout and diseased eyes, had brought him back to health. He had eased his body then, and now he began to ease his mind.

Patiently he listened to the King's complaints, his fears, his suspicions; talked to him, reasoned with him, laughed at him. He read the concession again to the distracted man, and proved that he had not parted with a single acre of his country. He assured him that Rhodes would never interfere with the Matabele as long as they left him to work the gold in peace.

For weeks he remained at the *kraal*, and when he

left he had reconciled the King to the acceptance of Rhodes's plan of sending up an expedition to start the occupation of Mashonaland.

There were critical moments later when the expedition was on the road, and Lobengula had a difficult task to keep his young bloods in hand. But when they saw that the whites were as anxious to avoid them as they themselves were to keep them at a distance they became calm. They watched the white men march past their borders, and when they reached the country of the Mashonas, and settled down quietly to work on the reefs which Hartley and Mauch had discovered twenty years before, they ceased to bother about them.

That was the Matabele way. As long as they were not interfered with they accepted things as they were and took no thought of the morrow.

It was not Lobengula's way. He saw the little expedition swelled by a steady stream of police and settlers with waggons and horses. He heard of the towns they were building and of the farms they were laying out. His own slaves and vassals were working now for the white men, trading with them and paying tribute to them. His old raiding-ground was full of a restless horde of invaders, always pushing their way farther and farther in their search for gold. It was too late now to stop them, but he knew that sooner or later there must come a clash, and he would be powerless to prevent it. He must just sit still and wait.

It all came through that accursed paper! Why had he allowed himself to sign it?

He looked back to the days when he was a hunter, with no cares or thoughts of the future.

Why had he ever allowed himself to be made a king?

Chapter XIX

THE BITERS BITTEN

"*Indaba! Indaba!* (News!)" cried the three travel-stained soldiers as they ran through Bulawayo along the path that led towards the royal quarters. Quickly a number of idlers gathered, and kept pace with them as they hurried on. "What is the news? What has happened? Where do you come from?" they asked repeatedly. But the three would not pause to talk. "It is for the King's ears," was all they would say. Then other soldiers were seen in the distance, and the crowd turned to meet them, greedy to appease their curiosity. Gradually it leaked out that they brought tidings of the army—that it had fought a battle with the white men somewhere in the east, and that many *matjaha* had been killed. This was news indeed! By the time the first arrivals reached the palisade of the King's *kraal* some hundreds of excited men and women had congregated in the hope of hearing further tit-bits, and were pressing round the gateway repeating and enlarging what they had already picked up. Soon the great town was buzzing with details, and by degrees the story was pieced together.

One of the crack regiments of veterans,

commanded by Manyao, a well-known old *induna*, had been wantonly attacked by the English settlers. It had all started out of nothing—merely a little winter raid to punish an unruly Mashona chief who had made away with some of the King's cattle entrusted to him for safe custody. But one thing had led to another. After 'wiping out' this cattle-thief and sacking his villages, they had gone on to other villages, where they found an abundance of sleek cows and young girls, and so, burning, killing and looting, they had spent a week of real enjoyment and had collected a fine mob of cattle. A jolly time altogether until some of those cursed Mashona dogs had run to the white man's *kraal* (Fort Victoria) and sought sanctuary there, and the white men had had the effrontery to raise objections to the pursuit—had even refused to surrender the refugees. They sent for their big chief, Dakatéla (Dr. Jameson), who came down from Salisbury and rudely ordered the King's *impi* to clear out. Not only that, but when they had left the town and were burning another village, some way off, Dakatéla sent after them soldiers on horseback, who attacked them with their guns and killed thirty, one of whom was Mgandaan, their captain. Was this sort of thing to be endured? Who were these insolent white men who claimed the right to dictate where and how they should carry on their time-honoured pastime, and who was this Dakatéla who ordered them about in their own country?

The *indunas* of the nation clamoured for revenge, and implored the King to send a strong army to teach the English interlopers a lesson and rid the country for ever of their hateful presence.

But Lobengula knew Jameson and had no illusions about the white men. He was wise enough to realise that they had come to stop, and was well aware that behind them was Rhodes, whom he had never set eyes upon, but who was the prime mover in all this gold-digging business, and was, moreover, one of the *indunas* of the Great White Queen. He was desperately anxious to avoid an open breach with the English, for, although their presence on his frontiers irritated him beyond measure, he had a secret conviction that in a trial of arms they would prove too strong for his *impis*. It was a difficult task, however, to keep his truculent soldiers on a leash, for they had been taught to believe themselves invincible, and at any moment might drive him into a position from which he could not retreat. Perhaps they had already done so. But even now he might be able to patch matters up, and accordingly he refused to give way to their importunities or to order out his armies until he had heard both sides of the story.

First he must send for Johann Colenbrander—Rhodes's man—who was stationed at Bulawayo to act as his adviser in all matters arising between the Matabele and the whites, and who had given him wise counsel on many occasions when there had

been trouble in the air. Hardly had he come to this decision when Colenbrander himself rode up, and, to the King's annoyance, there came with him his wife, mounted on a handsome white stallion. They tied their horses to posts outside the enclosure and advanced towards the King, who was seated on a chair under the shade of his favourite *indaba* tree. For a few minutes he ignored them, and ostentatiously busied himself with a large calabash of beer which a crouching slave-girl held up to him. At last, looking up and wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, he hailed them in an off-hand, blustering manner, assumed to impress his councillors with his contempt for people whose countrymen had committed so grave an outrage. He swept aside a platter of steaming beef which another girl offered, so violently that the scalding gravy bespattered her face and arms, causing her to utter a sharp cry of pain. She started back, cowering, and joined the other women who knelt in a group behind. A burst of savage laughter broke out from the onlookers. Lobengula glared round at the semi-circle of *indunas*.

" Begone, all of you ! " he exclaimed. " I wish to speak my mind to Johann."

With ill-concealed reluctance they gathered up their sticks and belongings and retreated to a little distance, where they were, however, still within earshot. The women wriggled into the background and, one after another, slipped out of sight. The

King was left alone with Colenbrander and his wife, who stood calmly facing him, and, whatever their inner feelings might be, betraying no outward sign of uneasiness.

Of all the white people who came and went in and out of Matabeleland, these were the two for whom Lobengula had the greatest esteem. Colenbrander, a broad, stocky Natalian, with sunburnt face and short fair beard, had won his confidence by an open manner and an unfailing good temper. He had an extraordinary command of the Zulu language, and, still more important, an intuitive knowledge of the workings of the native mind, which enabled him to read Lobengula's thoughts even when they were not translated into speech. For Colenbrander's wife, who was also a skilled native linguist, the King had no feelings of friendship, but he stood in considerable awe of her on account of her stately presence, her contempt for danger and the easy nonchalance—so far removed from the deference of other white people—with which she treated him. She was, in truth, a very striking figure as she now stood before him in the unpleasant squalor of the goat *kraal*. A tall brunette, with flashing eyes and stately, almost arrogant, carriage, she was in the full prime of womanly maturity. With one hand she held up the folds of her khaki drill habit, and in the other she grasped the handle and lash of a hunting-crop, stuck under her arm. Over her shoulder was a strap supporting a revolver in its holster. A

broad-brimmed felt hat was perched, rather jauntily, on her head, shading her clear-cut features from the scorching sun. Her full-lipped mouth was curved in a faint smile, which froze into contempt when the King upset the platter of beef. Perhaps as the old savage met her unflinching gaze his mind may have travelled back to that other white woman—the Dutch girl Sara, who had saved his life as a child, watched over him, and moulded his character until he grew to manhood. This early association may have bred in him a regard for white women such as African natives never entertain for those of their own race, and are, as a rule, incapable of understanding when it is exhibited by Englishmen. Be that as it may, Maria Colenbrander was one whom few Europeans would have dared to cross, and whom the Matabele ruler always treated with respect.

In a low, almost whining voice he now began to speak.

" Johann," he said, " I gave Ulodzi and Dakatéla leave to dig for gold. I did not give them my country. Yet they have brought up an army, and now the land is full of young men who call it their own. Dakatéla tells me I must not send out my *impis*, but his soldiers go everywhere, and now they have killed some of my *matjaha*. Am I then no longer the King ? Is Dakatéla the King, that he talks to me like this ? Answer me, Johann. Why do they do these things in my country ? "

Colenbrander hesitated while he cast round for a

diplomatic reply. He knew that, in season and out of season, the King was being importuned by his young braves to send an army to wipe out the white settlers, who were creeping like ants over their old raiding-grounds in Mashonaland and building towns there. He knew that the King's one desire was to shirk trouble and to live at peace. Anxious to draw him into a dilemma, he fenced with the question.

" Rhodes and Jameson know that you are the King," he began. " They do not want to interfere with you. All they want is to get out the gold which you have given them. How are they to do this if your young men attack and kill those that work for them on the mines ? "

His wife interrupted him.

" Let me talk, Johann," she said ; then, turning to Lobengula and speaking fluently in his own language, she went on :

" I am the King's friend, and speak to him as if he were my brother. The King does not understand the Englishman's heart. The King has given them leave to dig for gold, and now it is too late to try and stop them. Every day more and more will come. At present they are content with the country of the Mashona, but if the King's soldiers molest the Mashona who are working for them they will fight, and then they will come and attack the King at his own town."

Lobengula started. This witch of a woman had

put into words the idea that was always haunting him.

" What does a woman know about such things ? " he broke in. " You have never seen my armies in battle. These few white men will only make a breakfast for them. Have you forgotten what happened to the white soldiers at Isandhlwana ? "

" Yes, King," she answered, " I am a woman, and have lived in Zululand, and I remember Isandhlwana ; and you perhaps have forgotten what happened afterwards to Cetewayo. He thought he was strong, and at first he killed some white men. But the Great White Queen sent more soldiers, and more, for the English never give in. And tell me," she went on, raising her voice, " where is Cetewayo now ? Be wise in time, and try to keep the peace with these people, lest you be eaten up by them as Cetewayo was."

Her last words reached the *indunas*, and a stir of excitement ran through them. Some of the old ones seemed to see reason in her speech ; indeed, Mjaan, the veteran Commander-in-Chief, and one or two others, nodded in agreement. But most showed extreme indignation, and Sekombo, a huge man with an ox-like countenance, rose to his knees and asked leave to speak.

" Pay no heed to this yapping she-jackal, Great One," he cried. " Tell her to go back to her husband's *kraal* and attend to his food and drink. Bid her leave men's affairs to men to talk

about. We are not children, to be scolded by a woman ! "

Instantly Maria turned a flashing eye on the speaker.

" You, Sekombo, think because you have spent your life ripping open the bellies of old women and beating the brains out of babies that you are a great fighter ! You have not stood up to Englishmen in battle nor seen them shoot with their quick-firing guns. I don't talk to you, but to your master." Then again to the King :

" Keep your baby-killers in check, King, or soon you will find that they will drag you to your ruin, and your country will belong to others. *Sala guhle, Kumalo !* "

With head erect she stalked out of the presence, signing to her husband to follow. Mounting her white horse, she gave him a stroke with her crop, causing him to rear and then lash out with his heels. The astonished *indunas* gave way and suffered her to pass.

Not till she reached her home was the woman in her revealed. Once within its safe shelter, she flung herself on a couch and burst into a hysterical fit of sobs mingled with laughter.

But Johann was filled with forebodings. All through the night he made hurried preparations for flight on horseback, for he dreaded the result of his wife's harangue. Before daybreak he was alarmed by hearing movements in his compound, and,

peering cautiously out, saw his scared native driver and the other servants driving up the oxen and yoking them into their waggon.

" It is by the King's orders," said one. " He has been told that your woman is a sorceress, and will work harm for him. You are both to go, and go quickly. The other *amakiwa* (white folk) have been ordered to leave also."

This was how Lobengula cut himself off from those who would have counselled him for his good.

Chapter XX

WAR

The pride of the Matabele had been sorely wounded. One and all they felt as a man feels who has been stung by a scorpion—a wild, burning desire to crush and kill. Had the affair at Victoria occurred in the days of Mziligazi the *impis* would have been mustered, and at the first favourable moment would have been hurled suddenly on the little township of Victoria, to massacre all its inhabitants without mercy. If Lobengula had been bold enough to adopt this course he would have had every man in the nation with him. He would have gained a temporary advantage, and the clock of civilisation would have been put back for several years.

Fortunately for civilisation, he was hampered by his incurable habit of looking ahead. His long intercourse with missionaries and traders had taught him something of the psychology of the English, and he felt by instinct that unless this new trouble could be patched up they would never rest until they had him beat.

Torn between his own passionate desire for peace and the clamour of all around him for vengeance, he

strove to gain time by sending off letters—letters to Jameson, to the Governor at the Cape, to the Queen of England even—some couched in blusterous language, asserting his right to do what he wished in his own country, others with querulous protestations that he had been wantonly attacked. Fatal procrastination! For Jameson was arming and training his farmers and miners at Salisbury and Victoria and enrolling volunteers in the south.

Meanwhile patrols were keeping watch on both sides of the border. At any moment a spark might start a blaze.

It was not long in coming. During the last days of September the news reached Bulawayo that shots had been fired; that bodies of white soldiers were on the move—long columns of mounted men with waggons, making for the Matabele border.

And now a letter arrived from the Governor at the Cape, making a last appeal to Lobengula for his own sake to recall his troops and to send down some *indunas* to talk matters over, so that there might be peace. There were only three white men left in Matabeleland—Fairbairn and Usher, who were trading outside Bulawayo, and James Dawson, who was at his store in the *kraal*, and who read the letter to the King and took down his reply. The King's own brother, Ingubogubo, and two other *indunas* were charged with the task of taking this to Cape-town, and at his earnest request Dawson agreed to go with them. But the patrols were not

recalled, for every day brought news of Jameson's advance.

The armies camped round Bulawayo grew more and more restive. Their impatience turned to anger, and even to threats. Some of the older men were on the side of caution, but they were outnumbered by the younger ones, whose temper was hot and almost insubordinate. The King held long *indabas* with his councillors. The war party were noisy and insistent.

" There must be no more delay, O King. Let the *impis* go and teach these wolves a lesson. They are only a few—a little matter for your great army."

Sekombo was the loudest.

" Send me with two regiments only, my father ; we will wipe out the Dakatéla and his gold-diggers. We have guns as well as they. But assegais are better. We will spring on them unawares in the Somabula forest, where they cannot use their guns. When all have been stabbed to death, and their entrails thrown to the jackals, we can go on to the towns and kill the others."

It was the end of the dry season, and the country was panting for the first rains. The *veld* was parched and brown, except where great black patches showed that it had been burnt. The cattle were scraggy and lean. Many of the rivers were reduced to mere chains of pools connected by thin, trickling channels. The women were waiting for showers to moisten the soil, so that they could start

breaking it for the new sowing. The heat was intense, and every evening dark thunder-clouds gathered in the sky, but drifted away without bursting. Lobengula knew that it was the worst possible time for beginning a campaign, and he might still have tried to hold back the hotheads, had not word suddenly come to him that the *indunas* sent with Dawson had been killed by the Queen's troops at Tati on the way down, and his efforts for peace foiled.

A blind rage seized him. So this was British honour ! Well, since they wanted war they should have war. No longer would he believe in their sham talk about wishing for peace. In bitter indignation he sent for Mjaan, and gave orders for the army to assemble.

Thousands upon thousands had been waiting at Bulawayo for this summons. Before the sun was up on the next morning they mustered in a vast crescent facing the rising ground on which stood the royal enclosure, and sat in expectant rows according to their regiments. All were wearing the black war-plume and carrying their shields and spears. There was a general hum of subdued conversation, like the droning of a swarm of wild bees. All had heard of the killing of the King's messengers. They knew, too, that there were now three columns of white men moving against them, two from the east and one from the south. It was said that the first two had joined hands at Iron Mine Hill. They were

not big armies—not as many men, all told, as would make two of the Matabele regiments. Now was the time to get at them. Eat up the fighting men first and then fall on the towns and mining-camps and finish off the remainder. There were a few women and children at these places. They must be killed too. White women and children were useless, and, if spared, would be an everlasting cause of trouble, for other white men would come up to rescue them. No, they must all be assegaied, and the country rid for ever of the whole hateful brood. Only by a general massacre would others be scared away. The few white men in Bulawayo had already fled in a panic—all except Fairbairn and Usher, who were out on a trading expedition. No need to worry about them. They could be hunted down at leisure or despatched as soon as they turned up.

This was the sort of talk that passed from mouth to mouth while the great army waited on the slopes round Bulawayo.

The gaze of every man in the multitude was riveted on the gateway of the royal enclosure, and, though now and then one would glance aside for an instant to speak to his neighbour, his eyes came back at once to the same spot.

" *Nanku ! Nanku !* (There he is !)"

The exclamation burst from a hundred mouths at once, and instantly the buzzing murmur stopped, and was succeeded by dead silence as the towering figure of their King was seen filling the opening.

Now that he had made up his mind, he meant to carry out his programme with all proper solemnity. His naked body was daubed with streaks of blue paint, and a long feather stood up from his bare head. He carried himself with all his old dignity, and, after standing a minute at the gate looking round at his warriors, he slowly and majestically paced down the slight incline. He turned towards the east, where the grey outline of the hill Tabas Induna rose on the skyline. Raising high the *assegai* which he carried in his right hand, he poised it, and, with a loud cry, drove it into the earth in front.

It may have been the force he used, or the point may have struck a stone, for the shaft snapped, and only a white, quivering splinter remained sticking out of the ground. But no one noticed this. It was the signal they had been looking for, and every man in the huge concourse leapt to his feet. The silence was rent by a hissing scream, "*Jiya!*" as each copied the King's example and plunged his blade into an unseen foe. A few rushed in front of the lines and went through exultant war-dances. The rest broke into excited groups.

By midday the regiments had received their orders; by sundown they had started in different directions. Four were to hasten to the Somabula forest, where they were to lie hidden and surprise the invaders in the thick bush. The Insukamini, Isizela, Hlati and Amaveni corps were chosen for this honour. Gambo, the King's son-in-law, the

head of several military *kraals*, was ordered to take a force to the south, and the two crack regiments, Imbezu and Induba, composed of picked young men, and led by Mjaan, the Commander-in-Chief, were kept for the time being in reserve at Tabas Induna.

Before nightfall the great *kraal* was left once more in comparative calm.

But Lobengula sat through the hours of darkness talking earnestly with the witch-doctors; poring over the entrails of goats, and studying the omens. He could not banish from his mind the accident of the *assegai* which broke when he hurled it.

In the next few days there were many things to be done which he must himself superintend. Special 'medicine' had to be prepared—not the rain medicine usual at this time of year, but war medicine: potent oils to be smeared on the soldiers to make their skins impervious to bullets; unguents to render them invisible; magic grease to be rubbed on the *assegais* to guide their aim; powders and other concoctions to be thrown into the rivers to prevent the enemy crossing them.

And there were more secret matters as well to be taken in hand—measures of precaution which the King tried to keep to himself, but which showed that some of his old uneasiness had returned.

Twice at night waggons left the *kraal* bound for an unknown destination. Rumour said they were loaded with hundreds of tusks of ivory, to be carried

to a safe hiding-place. It was certain that a huge pit was being dug on the banks of the Umgusa river, and after a few days it was noticed that this had been filled in and the surface covered with brushwood, which was then burnt. The slaves who did this work never came back. Then the King's own travelling-waggon was loaded with his bath-chair, his furniture and other belongings, and kept standing near his quarters. It was explained that he was himself going to the front to take the supreme command. But for the time being he stayed at home and hardly showed himself.

Except for the absence of all the young men the *kraal* resumed its normal appearance, and everything was quiet, until one day some messengers ran in, mud-stained and blood-stained, with the staggering news that a great battle had been fought at the Shangani river, that many *matjaha* had been killed and others taken captive, and that the army was falling back in disorder.

Chapter XXI

FLIGHT

The capital seethed with excitement. Men ran to and fro rounding up cattle. Women began to gather together their possessions and make them into bundles. Children clustered into whimpering groups, conscious of some peril but nôt understanding what it was or where it was coming from. An indescribable confusion prevailed, and everyone was shouting orders and counter-orders. The hurried movement of men and oxen stirred up clouds of fine dust, which caught the sun's glare and filled the atmosphere with a pungent golden mist. The heat was intense, for, though black clouds loomed every evening in the west, not a drop of rain had fallen.

Only in the *godhlo*, the inner courtyard of the royal *kraal*, was there any semblance of quiet, and here in the late afternoon a week later, when the turmoil had somewhat abated, the King sat in his usual place under the *indaba* tree to decide the fate of the two white men, Fairbairn and Usher, who had been intercepted on their trading trip and brought to Bulawayo.

Lobengula was suffering from gout, and one of his

feet was swathed in dirty bandages, but, despite this, he rose and limped painfully up and down the enclosure. The effort was too great, however, and he sank panting into his chair, staring gloomily at the two prisoners, who sat on the ground before him, smoking pipes and trying to preserve a calmness they were far from feeling. The King's manner was anxious. The muscles of his face twitched, his hands fidgeted and his forehead was beaded with sweat.

" If I spare you, Jimmy, and you, Usher," he said at length, " what will you do for me ? You are only two. These men with Dakatéla are many. How can you stop them from destroying me ? "

" King," replied Fairbairn, " have we ever tricked you ? Did we forsake you when the others ran away ? Did not Usher and I come to you every day and entreat you to send messengers to Jameson to ask for peace ? Now it is too late to stop him. His white soldiers are at your very gates. If when they arrive they find us alive and unhurt, they will know you have saved us, and will deal lightly with you—maybe allow you to go on and rule your country. But if you have us killed it will be a bad look-out for you. They will never rest till they catch you, and then they will hang you for murder."

Bold words indeed, and such as no one had ever dared to use before to the King. But Fairbairn knew that their plight was desperate, and that the only chance was to give the King a fright. He was

a thick-set man of about forty, with a short, fair beard and a face bronzed almost to copper-colour by long exposure to the sun. Usher, the other trader, was gaunt and loose-limbed. The sickly pallor of his face showed that he was in wretched health, and, in fact, he would have tried to escape, as all the other white men had, if it had not been that he was away on the *veld*, ill with malaria, and unable to move.

There were others present—Mjaan, the Commander-in-Chief; Mlugulu, another famous fighter; Bozungwane, the head of the priests; and one whom we have not seen before, a small sly man, with a lighter skin than the Matabele, and dressed differently—in a greasy corduroy jacket, trousers and a broad-brimmed hat. He was following the proceedings intently, turning every now and then to Mlugulu and whispering in his ear. From outside rose the hubbub of voices, of drums beating, of cattle lowing and dogs yelping. Lobengula was getting impatient. The *indaba* must be finished, for there were many things to be done and the enemy was pressing ever nearer. He spoke to the light-skinned man in the hat:

"John Jacobs," he said, "take these two to their house and make them write a letter and give it to you. The letter must say their words and my words—that they are my friends, and that, although their people are seeking to destroy me and seize my country, I have given them my pledge that they shall not suffer harm. And you, Mjaan, call some

soldiers and give them my command. These two men must not be hurt, but they must be left safe in their store, and if Dakatéla and his army come here, they shall find them alive and well. Go in peace, white men, and tell Dakatéla I have not broken faith with you."

Whatever his feelings may have been, Fairbairn behaved with absolute *sang froid*. He re-lit his pipe, which had gone out, and, walking up to Lobengula, shook him by the hand. "Stay in peace, King," he said. "Whatever happens now, it will always be remembered that you played the game by your friends."

Usher also shook hands with the King, and the two then turned to Mjaan and signed that they were ready to go.

As they passed through and showed themselves outside, an ominous growl of anger, swelling to a threatening roar, rose from those who hung round the entrance. But Mjaan knew his duty, and, beckoning to some of the soldiers, bade them close in and keep the mob at bay. Even with this protection they stood in peril, for the rabble was an excited one, and from all sides men were running up to swell it. Shouts of "*Tshaya! Bulala!* (Beat them! Kill them!)" were heard above the din. Fairbairn kept his hand in his pocket and gripped the stock of his revolver. He told Usher to do the same, but on no account to draw. They were ready to sell their lives dearly, but their chance of escape was not particularly

strong. There were at least a hundred men there, and it seemed doubtful if Mjaan's soldiers could keep them back.

At this moment, however, an opportune diversion occurred. A small party of weary-looking men was seen approaching the *kraal*, having the appearance of fugitives, and at once the mob turned to them to hear what tidings they brought. Under cover of this new interest, Mjaan and the soldiers hustled the white men away, and in a few minutes they were out of immediate danger.

The newcomers were only about a dozen in number, but one was an *induna*, and, after interrogation at the gate, he and two companions were allowed to enter the presence of the King, who was still talking with his chief councillors. He had recovered his self-possession and had sent for some beer, which he was drinking in deep gulps. The evening was drawing on and the air was cooler. The three who entered bore signs of having travelled all day. Their skins were streaked with mud and blotched with congealed blood from cuts and scratches. Their head-dresses were torn. One had a cloth bandage on his arm ; another had lost his skin kilt and was quite naked ; none of them had shields, and when they saw the King they flung aside their *assegais* and prostrated themselves.

" They are here ! " cried the *induna*. " They are upon us ! This very day have we been fighting with the white *impi* ! "

All in the *kraal* started to their feet.

" Where ? " shouted the King. " Where was the fight ? " He glanced fearfully over his shoulder, as if expecting to see white soldiers climbing over the palisade.

" At the Bembesi river," said the spokesman. " We are of the Insukamini regiment. We were driven back at the Shangani by the big guns of the white men. They went ' BOOM ! ' and threw out great balls, which burst, and out of them came hundreds of bullets, which ran after us and cut us down. Our captain, Ndevani, hanged himself, but many of us got together and lay in wait for the *makiwa* at the Bembesi, and there we nearly got their horses, but again they fired their big guns, and little guns also, which go ' *Tshaka-tshaka-tshaka !* ' and out fly bullets like wild bees when one disturbs them. They drove us back again, and now they are close by at Tabas Induna, and in the morning they will be here. It is witchcraft, O King ! Their guns are enchanted. We must get away or they will find us and kill us all. Even you, King, will not be safe. Oh, fly ! Fly ! These *makiwa* are not men, but devils ! "

During this long harangue the King had time to regain some composure, and at once began issuing orders.

" My waggons must be inspanned. I will collect the army at Umgusa, and we will teach the *makiwa* a lesson. Now we must leave. They shall not have Bulawayo. There is still the night. A few men

must stay, and before dawn the town must be fired. The ivory ! Is it safe ? " he added suddenly, looking at Bozungwane.

" King, it is in the hiding-place which we agreed upon, and the slaves who covered it up I have killed with my own hands."

" Get the oxen inspanned at once," the King repeated. " Mjaan, you will follow with your *impis*. You, Bozungwane, will take two waggons and bring on my wives."

He glanced anxiously round. A few women, children and slaves had silently crept into the enclosure and were crouching nervously close to the fence. Although it was nearly dark, he could make out among them the brown face of John Jacobs, who had discarded his European clothes, all but the jacket, and seemed prepared for a journey as he carried a small bundle. The King made a sign to him.

" You also must come," he said. " Wait here now, and bid the others be gone. Bring one slave with you and follow me."

Grunting with the agony of his gouty foot, he hobbled to his sleeping-hut and entered, followed by the others. A small fire burning on the floor shed a dim light on the interior. The King lifted a *kaross*, groped about for a minute, and pointed to two square packages wrapped in sacking, which lay, with other odds and ends, beneath it.

" Put these in the tent of my waggon," he said, " close to where I sleep."

Jacobs, with an alacrity which he tried to conceal, lifted one, the slave the other, and both went outside to the waggon and climbed on to the driver's box. It was now quite dark. Jacobs told the slave to find a place to deposit the packages, and, while the man was fumbling with the curtains and feeling about, he quickly drew out his clasp-knife and cut a small slit in the canvas of the package he was carrying. Deftly inserting two fingers, he brought out something which he placed in his mouth, repeating the movement several times. His cunning eyes glistened. He had found what he expected.

The sacking covered an old biscuit tin, and it was full to the brim of rough diamonds.

The oxen were already yoked when the King came out of his hut. With much groaning he clambered laboriously into the tent, assisted by Jacobs and the slave. The driver's whip cracked like a pistol-shot; the oxen strained; the waggon lurched unsteadily down the slope and turned into a track leading towards the Umgusa river. At the sound of the creaking and rumbling, men, women and children stole out like shadows from the huts on the wayside and fell in silently behind. They had been given no orders or warnings, but obeyed a blind instinct which told them that where their King went they must follow. In front, in rear and on both flanks marched large masses of soldiers, holding themselves erect and proud, but not chanting the usual war-songs.

For three hours they pushed on, till they came to the hill known as 'the woman big with child,' and here, on the high ground among the thorn-bushes, Lobengula called a halt. While his people scattered in all directions, seeking a place to rest, he struggled on to the waggon box and looked out through the cool blackness towards the south. For the remainder of the night he sat there, hardly moving, until at last he caught sight of a bright streak, which quickly grew into a ruddy glow stretching far along the sky-line. Just as day broke there came the dull rumble of an explosion, like a peal of distant thunder, and a huge black cloud rose up, hanging for some minutes over Bulawayo in the shape of a gigantic mushroom.

With a groan of relief, mingled with bitterness, the King turned back into the darkness of the tent.

" They may drive me out of my town," he cried, " but they shall not have it for themselves ! "

Chapter XXII

THE HALF-BREED

The first rains of summer had always been the signal for general rejoicing. The seed-time; the time when the new grass first showed on the burnt *veld* and the lean cattle began to put on flesh; when the armies returned from their winter raids to rest and drink beer in the *kraals*, while the women were busy at their work in the fields.

This year the early rains were anything but a blessing. The country was in a turmoil; the fighting men were still scattered abroad; no beer had been brewed, for the grain bins were empty; the women were flying from the villages, and subsisting on roots and the sodden remains of last season's harvest. Their King, with his chief councillors and some of his wives, and a draggled following of women, children and slaves, was trekking slowly and painfully away from the gutted capital where, a few weeks before, he had sat in barbarous state. It was a gloomy procession that marched along the rough track which led to the mission station of Shiloh, now, of course, abandoned. Its retreat was covered by the remnants of several *impis*—twice beaten, but still defiant, and

itching for a further encounter. Mjaan was at their head—Mjaan, the old general, who had grown up with Lobengula, and, whatever happened, would stand by him to the last. Their progress was hampered by the incessant storms. Food was scarce and there was no dry grass to make shelters at night. The three waggons were constantly sticking in the mud, and the poverty-stricken cattle had to be double-spanned to get them over the drifts. But there could be no rest nor waiting. The white army was at Bulawayo, and at any moment a mounted column might overtake and attack them.

It was the morning of the fourth day, and the fugitives were halted on the edge of a small spruit which ran below the mission station. Lobengula was sleeping in the tent of his own waggon, which was surrounded by a strong bodyguard. The station had already been ransacked, and the *stoep* and garden were strewn with an indescribable litter—Bibles and other books, rent from their covers and trampled in the mud ; pictures of sacred subjects and photographs ; curtains, blankets and torn wearing apparel ; here a smashed bedstead, there a wrecked perambulator ; kitchen utensils and other furniture pitched out wantonly from the cherished homestead of the missionary, who had vainly laboured for years to teach the love of Christ to these savages.

All round, the soldiers were lighting small fires to

cook their mealie pap, seizing chairs and tables from the wreckage for fuel. Women were moving in an endless file, bringing pots of water from the stream.

One of them uttered a shrill cry of alarm.

" Men on horses ! "

All threw down their loads and ran helter-skelter for cover. Could it be the white *impi* ? Mjaan shouted out some orders, and the soldiers at once left their half-cooked meal and began to form up in battle order. The bustle and excited chatter roused Lobengula, who came to the front of his waggon and questioned those near him, looking anxiously to the south and straining his ears to catch the sound of rifle-shots.

It was a false alarm. A party of scouts appeared escorting three colonial Kaffirs, who were leading horses. One of them was waving a piece of white calico, and as he drew near he shouted in the Zulu language. He was bringing a letter for the King, he cried.

Somewhat roughly, the three were hustled into the presence. They were breathless and a little agitated, but showed no real fear. The letter was produced and handed to Lobengula, who took it and turned it over in his hands.

" Who has sent you, and where do you come from ? "

" The white chief, Jameson, has sent us. We come from Bulawayo, where he and his army are resting."

" What does the letter say ? "

" We cannot read it, King, but it has Jameson's own words. He gave it to us, and bade us ask you to come and talk with him."

" Let John Jacobs come," commanded the King, " and take these fellows out of the way."

The half-breed, who at the first alarm had skulked out of sight, came forward.

" These men say they have brought me a paper with the words of Dakatéla," said the King, addressing him. " Look well at it and tell me what his words are."

Jacobs took the letter, and studied it carefully for some minutes, while all around waited in dead silence.

Big decisions are often influenced by little, dirty people. It would have been difficult to find in all Africa a more worthless scoundrel than this one who now held the fate of Lobengula in his hand.

John Jacobs was the bastard son of a Fingo woman —the offspring of a chance intimacy with a Dutch *bywoner*. Forsaken in childhood by his mother, he had been befriended by a missionary and his wife, who had taught him to read and write English. An apt pupil, but a thieving, vicious little wretch, they had been relieved when he had drifted off to Kimberley, where he speedily picked up every kind of villainy from the low characters infesting the diamond-diggings in those days. Before he was full

grown he became an habitual 'I.D.B.,' and in due course was caught and sentenced to a term of hard labour on the Breakwater. For some time after his release he was engaged as a police trap, but his crooked instincts made him untrustworthy even for this degraded occupation, and one conviction followed another. A sentence of lashes inflicted for a gross assault on a woman scared him for a time, and when a warrant for his arrest was issued for another foul crime he decided to leave civilisation, and fled to Matabeleland.

He reached Bulawayo just about the time when the white people were clearing out, and quickly ingratiated himself with Lobengula, who, deprived of the aid of the missionaries and traders, made use of him for reading and writing letters. Gradually he slipped into the position of the King's confidential secretary and adviser. In order to undermine the influence of the 'great wife,' Losikeyi, he subtly plied her with his addresses, which met with such success that before long the two were involved in a guilty intrigue. Had the King been in a normal state of mind and body, this would have been a perilous game, but his anxieties were telling on his health, and he was frequently prostrated by attacks of his old enemy, the gout, which prevented him from keeping his eye on what went on in his household. Losikeyi, as chief of the harem, enjoyed more freedom than the other royal ladies, and was at the same time the repository of the secrets of her lord and master.

She had long cast a greedy eye on his treasure, and, with the idea that Jacobs might be of use, she confided to him her avaricious designs. He thus played the double rôle of paramour and accomplice, and in a short time had her completely in his power.

This man now held in his hands a letter which he alone of all those present could read—a letter fraught with the gravest import to Lobengula and his nation.

It was a long letter, and besought Lobengula to stop further warfare and bloodshed by coming himself back to Bulawayo to talk matters over, and guaranteed his safety and kind treatment. But Jacobs saw that if the King complied he would have to accompany him, or else lose his job and all hope of spoil. He remembered also the warrant, and the scars of his lashes tingled at the thought of putting himself again within reach of the law.

" What does the letter say ? " repeated the King impatiently.

" The Dakatéla says you must come to Bulawayo, Great One, and talk to him about peace ; doubtless it is a trap to catch you and kill you."

The King's eyes flashed as he turned to his *indunas*.

" What say you ? " he asked. " Is it a trap ? "

Old Mjaan shook his head.

" It must be so, my father ; I do not trust the Dakatéla and his talk of peace. Remember what happened to the men you sent with Dawson to talk about peace with the big *induna* of the Queen at

Capetown. They were killed, and so will you be. If Dakatéla wants peace, why does he not come himself to see you here ? "

The others chimed in. The suggestion made by Jacobs had roused their worst suspicions.

" It is a trap ! " they cried with one voice.

But Jacobs had a suggestion to make.

" Send the messengers back, King," he said. " Tell the Dakatéla you will come if he will build a house for you to live in. For your own is burnt. That will give you time to get away."

" Yes ! That is a good plan," replied the King. " Put that on a paper and send it to him."

Jacobs fumbled in his bag and produced the stump of a pencil. He picked up one of the books which lay about on the ground, and tore out a blank page. He wrote for a few minutes, and read aloud what he had written. The messengers were given the letter, and lost no time in getting off with it. They were only too glad to escape with their lives.

As soon as they were out of sight the King gave orders for the waggons to be inspanned. The weary oxen were flogged into movement, and the convoy headed once more northwards.

On, on, through bush and bog, round *kopjes* and across *dongas* they struggled. The country was waterlogged with the constant rain. Sometimes they could only cover a mile or two in a day. Disease appeared—dysentery and fever among the women and children, lung-sickness among the cattle. There

were deaths, but, whether human beings or beasts, their bodies were left by the wayside to make a meal for the vultures and hyenas.

They reached the Shangani River, and day after day crawled along its banks looking for a place to cross. In Lobengula's mind there was always the haunting dread of the white *impi* with the quick-firing guns, and he pressed on, regardless of the sufferings of the wretched people who tottered on behind him.

Three weeks after leaving Shiloh, when the King was chained to his bed in the waggon by an attack of gout, the long-expected, long-dreaded report came that a white *impi*—mounted men, without waggons, but with guns on carriages—was close behind them, and making all speed to catch them up. Almost at the same time, scouts from the advance party ran back to say they had found a fordable passage across the river, and that it was only one trek ahead. All depended on whether they could reach it before the soldiers caught them. Once safely across, they could cover the drift with their guns and shoot down the white men while they were struggling in the river. Could any means be found to delay them ? Without halting, Lobengula summoned Mjaan and Jacobs to his side. They found him lying on the *katel*, his face contorted with pain every now and then as the jolting of the waggon shook his swollen joints. Losikeyi was squatting on the floor of the waggon holding a calabash of beer on her knees.

"They press me hard," said the King. "They have my country; what more can they want? What good will it do them to catch me? Even if we cross the river, they will cross it too. What can we do to check them?"

"Let us make a stand here, my father, and fight them," cried Mjaan. "They have no big guns this time, nor waggons to skulk behind. Let us creep round them in the bush, and spring on them while they are marching, before they have time to get together."

But Jacobs's sordid mind had another suggestion.

"King," he said, "have you any money? English money in gold? That is what they want. White men will do anything for money. Send them back some, and tell them that if they take it and return you will go away for ever and leave them in peace."

He glanced furtively at Losikeyi, who spoke no word, but looked down and nodded her approval.

The proposal seemed to appeal to Lobengula. At any rate, it was worth trying.

"Yes," he said, after a moment's thought, "I will send them money."

For four years he had been getting £100 in sovereigns each month. Always it had been brought by Colenbrander or one of Rhodes's men in a little canvas bag with black letters on it. Always the King had counted it and put it away in a secret place. Some had been spent—in presents for his wives, or in buying waggons and horses from white men—

but many of the bags remained, and were now safely locked away in the box on the waggon, where he usually sat. It had a padlock, and Lobengula kept the key on a string round his neck. Now he felt for it, and, after hesitating a little, he sat up and gave it to Jacobs.

" Open the box," he said, " and count out ten bags, and give them to me."

The half-breed obeyed. When he pulled up the lid his eyes glistened, for there were the bags, and as he lifted one after another the coins inside them made a pleasant chink. He read the black letters painted on each bag—' STANDARD BANK OF SOUTH AFRICA.' He tried to count them, but the King called to him to make haste. Hurriedly he pulled out bag after bag until there were ten. He would have secreted one, but Mjaan's eyes were upon him and he knew he had no chance. With shaking voice the sick King addressed Mjaan, and pointed to the bags.

" Mjaan, listen ! Let my son Nyamanda and your son Mpini take this money to the *induna* of the white *impi*. Let them speak to him and give him my words, the words of Lobengula, the King of the Matabele. These are my words : ' White men, I am conquered. Take this money and go back. Take my country, but let me and my people go away and hide.' "

He sank back exhausted, and signed feebly to Mjaan to get down from the waggon and depart.

Mjaan found the two men, and gave them the

money and the message. But he was not going to be baulked of his own plans. He knew the weakness of the patrol. He was confident that his opportunity had come, and he resolved to attack them as soon as they left their camp the following morning.

Chapter XXIII

THE LAST THROW

The pursuing troops—not more than 150 mounted men, all told, with a couple of maxim guns—were falling in for a final effort to catch up the King. Like the Matabele, they had suffered grievously from the incessant rains. So far they had met no resistance, though now and then a shot fired from the bush on their flanks warned them that parties of the enemy were about, and that at any time they might expect attack. But the scent was hot. At the last two halts they had found traces of freshly abandoned native camps—even the smouldering embers of recent fires—and as they drew near the river they had caught sight, more than once, of cattle being driven hastily into cover.

Their horses were jaded and poor from want of mealies. It was almost impossible to keep the column in close formation, for, in spite of the danger, there were always careless men who lagged in rear.

To-day, as they left their camp about five miles from the river, the thunder-clouds were blacker than usual, and it was seen that a heavy storm was

brewing. The trumpeter sounded " Stand to your horses ! " and then " Mount ! " In a few minutes the column was once more on the march—all but two mess-orderlies, who were loading pack animals and fumbling about with the harness.

" Hurry up there ! " shouted a sergeant. " Why the hell can't you get a move on ? "

" All right, sergeant ! " one of them called out. " We're nearly ready. We'll catch you up in no time."

The sergeant cantered after his troop, and the two men went on struggling with the straps. One was a tall, fair Englishmen, the other a much smaller man with a strong streak of colour. The little one finished first, and, while waiting for his companion, lit a pipe, glanced at the disappearing troops, and then turned to look at the thick scrub on the river-side. Something moving in the bushes caught his eye, and he brought his Martini to the ' ready,' pulling down the lever and bringing it back with a click.

" What's up, Dan ? " said the other.

" Look there ! Look at those bloody niggers !— *Ufunani ?* (What do you want ?) " he cried, as two unarmed natives shambled out of the bush and flung themselves on their knees.

" Money, white men ! " they answered. " We bring money." And they pointed to two bundles they were carrying, bound to sticks and obviously heavy.

" Where do you come from ? " said the little man, who had a smattering of Zulu.

One of the natives pointed behind him. " The King has sent us—the Great One, Lobengula. He bade us give this money to the white chief, the captain of your *impi*, and tell him to take away his soldiers. We bring the King's words. ' Take the money and go back. I am beaten. Let me go in peace.' These are the King's own words, *Nkos*. Take us now to your captain."

An inspiration seized the little coffee-coloured orderly.

" This is the white captain," he said, pointing to his companion. " Give him the money. Tell your King it will be all right. The captain will order the soldiers to go back. Put the money down there and go back quickly. Go ! Damn you ! " he repeated, as he saw them hesitate. " Go, or I'll put a bullet into you " ; and he made as though to aim.

The two natives obeyed nervously, and, placing their bundles on the ground, beat a hasty retreat.

The little man cut the bundles open and disclosed their contents—a number of small bags which chinked pleasantly.

" Quick, Jim ! Get some of this into your wallets, and I'll take the rest. By Christ, we're in luck ! This must be gold. Hurry up, you duffer, or the sergeant will be coming back to look for us."

The Englishman stared stupidly, but he too had heard the chink of coins. He was not a thief by

nature, but the two were alone and the temptation was very strong. He followed the example of the other and hastily emptied the contents of his wallets—mealies, currycombs and brushes—on to the ground, cramming in several of the money-bags. The whole affair, from the moment when the natives first appeared, had hardly filled five minutes.

They mounted, and, driving spurs into their horses, cantered off to overtake the column. Their absence had not been detected. The sergeant had other matters to attend to. The advance guard had come upon the spoor, not two hours old, of the retreating Matabele, and one of the senior officers, Major Allan Wilson, had been ordered to pick out twenty of those who had the best horses to ride ahead and endeavour to get in touch with the enemy.

It was raining softly as the patrol formed up, and all knew that they had a wet job before them, but the men were eager for the duty ; something told them that the supreme moment of the campaign was at hand, and they fell in with high spirits. While waiting to start they exchanged chaff with the others, who stood round with waterproof sheets over their shoulders.

" Take care of the old man's wives," cried a trooper. " He's got forty. That will be two apiece for you."

" He's got a waggon-load of fizz," said another. " Bring back a bottle for me. I could do with a long drink."

Wilson gave the order to mount. As they climbed into their saddles, one of the troopers called back to a messmate :

" We'll be back in a couple of hours. If you don't keep some hot grub for me I'll wring your damned neck."

Light-heartedly they cantered off over the sodden *veld*. Long after dark two straggled back with the report that they had crossed the river and had seen the enemy encamped with waggons a short distance ahead on the opposite bank. Twenty more men were hastily got together and sent as reinforcements. They were not in such boisterous spirits as the first lot, for peals of thunder told them that they were in for a dirty night, but movement of any kind was better than shivering under a single blanket in the mud, and there was no grumbling. Shortly afterwards the storm burst, and the rain came down in a tropical deluge. At dawn scouts were sent forward to get in touch with the patrols, but found that the Shangani river had swelled to a raging flood, and was running bank high at the drift which they had meant to cross. The two patrols were cut off hopelessly from the main body, but they were a tough lot and well mounted. Nobody had any doubt about their coming through all right.

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Just about the time that Major Allan Wilson was starting with his men from the south bank of the Shangani, Mjaan had his whole force mustered for

instructions. A large body was told off to recross the river before daybreak and take up concealed positions on either side of the track. Those who had rifles—some two or three hundred in number—were to lie in the bushes skirting the drift through which the white troops must cross, and to open fire when the head of the column reached the north bank. The main body was to fall on them in rear as soon as they heard the rifle fire.

Scarcely had these orders been passed along the lines and repeated by the *indunas* when the alarming news came that the white army had already crossed, and, as all sprang to their arms and stood uncertain how to act, a few mounted men were made out in the fading light halted on the ridge where the ground began to slope down towards the river. Before the astonished Matabele could cover them with their rifles they were seen to be retiring—not back across the drift, but into the thick bush on the left. A body of Matabele was at once sent to reconnoitre, but darkness came on and the search was given up. Mjaan's plans were cancelled. Throughout the night the whole army remained on the alert, and at the first streak of dawn they moved in a huge crescent, in open formation, in the direction where the whites had last been seen. Their left flank rested on the river-bank, and as they saw it was running in flood they knew that the whites could not have recrossed and that they had them in a cleft stick.

The Matabele had not far to go. Close to the edge of the bush was an open space, and there, within a distance that a man might run without losing breath, they saw—not the whole force, as they expected, but a score or so of horses, with white soldiers standing between them. One or two of the Matabele had been observed, and shots rang out from the little group. The army then began an encircling movement, keeping out of sight, but cautiously closing in and firing. A white man fell, and then another. The horses were seen to be plunging. A steady fire was kept up on both sides, but numbers soon told. The ranks of the white party were seen to be thinning, and many of their horses had dropped. Gradually their fire slackened. The few remaining horses broke away and stampeded across the *veld*. Only about ten men were now holding out, kneeling behind the carcases of the dead horses and shooting whenever a native showed himself. The Matabele were within about a hundred yards, and were preparing for the final rush with *assegais*, when they saw one of the whites stand up, and heard him shout out a hoarse order. The others stopped firing, and also sprang to their feet. They took off their hats. A sound of singing came faintly over the *veld*—some war-song, no doubt—and as they sang two were seen to drop. The others shook hands and remained standing, their faces turned towards the Matabele, who were now out in the open. The moment had come. With a savage

yell the blacks charged forward and flung themselves on their victims.

In a few minutes it was all over, for no quarter was given. But no! One man had managed to reach an ant-heap, and stood behind it firing with pistols. He seemed to have quite a number, and several of his bullets found a mark. At last a lucky shot brought him down, yet even as he fell he fired a round.

Mjaan came up, panting and wheezing with the unaccustomed exertion.

"Strip them," he ordered, "but do not cut their bodies; for these are not Mashona dogs, but brave men. Leave their bodies where they lie. The jackals and vultures will do the rest."

He turned away towards the camp, and when they had finished robbing the dead the soldiers followed, dancing, shouting and boasting of their exploit.

By this time the sun was high in the heavens, and the old *induna* was weary. But the King would be waiting for him. He made at once for the waggon round which, by his orders, a thick *scherm* of bushes had been built the evening before. Outside the fence were the soldiers of the bodyguard, but not keeping the strict watch they should have been, for they had heard the sounds of firing and were gathered in groups, eagerly listening to some stragglers who had returned from the fight. For the moment Mjaan said nothing, but stooped down and entered through the low opening.

He started back in surprise. Bending over the waggon-box was the corpulent form of Losikeyi, the King's 'great wife,' and close beside her crouched the half-breed, Jacobs. The lid of the box was open, and the pair were busily engaged in examining its contents. The sharp eyes of Jacobs caught sight of the *induna*, and, with a low cry of warning, he slipped down like a rat to the farther side of the waggon. Losikeyi shut the lid with a bang, and retreated through the curtain into the tent.

But Mjaan had seen enough. He made a rush for Jacobs, who dodged round the waggon and, before the slow-moving old man could seize him or raise an alarm, had passed through the opening and disappeared. It was the last Mjaan or any of the Matabele ever saw of him, but for all that his dirty work was not finished.

When Mjaan turned back to the waggon, Losikeyi emerged at the opposite end of the tent with a sheepish grin on her well-oiled face.

" The Great One sleeps," she said. " You must not waken him. As for me, I must go and get some beer ready for him " ; and she too wriggled out of the enclosure.

Mjaan paused a moment and looked round. His eye caught sight of a small ladder of three steps lying by the waggon, and, propping it against the after end, he climbed into the tent.

There, stretched out on the *katel*, lay the ponderous form of the King, half covered with a blanket,

which left his chest and arms exposed. His eyes were partly open, and there was a little white froth at the corners of his mouth.

"*Nkosi*," said the old *induna* softly, and then, in a louder tone, "*Nkosi*, my father!"

But there was no reply.

Timidly Mjaan put out his hand and touched the King on the arm. He started back with a cry.

The arm was stone cold.